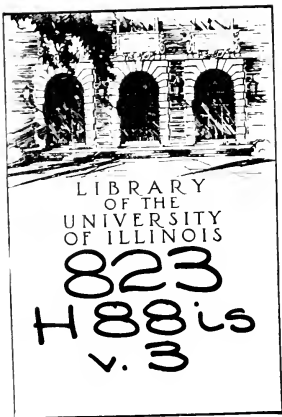


# The Island of Fantasy

*Fantasy Home*









*THE ISLAND OF FANTASY*

19<sup>th</sup> Dec 1885

*The*  
*Island of Fantasy*

*A Romance*

*By* FERGUS HUME

*Sorrow and weariness,  
Heartache and dreariness,  
None should endure;  
Scale ye the mountain peak,  
Vale o' the fountain seek,  
There is the cure.*

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

*VOL. III.*



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## THE ISLAND OF FANTASY.

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### CHAPTER XXVII.

#### THE ALTAR INSCRIBED ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ ΘΕΩ.

*By this altar stone I swear  
Never more to part from thee ;  
Thine in life and death to be,  
And thy future fortunes share.*

*Be the weather wild or fair,  
Dry on land or wet at sea,  
This vow shall be kept by me,  
By this altar stone I swear.*



THE next morning neither Helena nor Caliphronas were present at breakfast, as the girl, in company with Zoe, had gone up the mountain shortly after sunrise in quest of flowers, and the Greek had not been near the Acropolis since he had left it the previous night.

‘Can he have left the island?’ said Maurice anxiously to the Demarch.

‘Hardly,’ replied the old man grimly; ‘unless he has borrowed the wings of Icarus, for I alone have the key of the tunnel.’

‘There is the Western Pass,’ suggested Crispin thoughtfully.

‘True; but even supposing he did get to the sea-beach, he will find it difficult to obtain a boat,’ said Justinian calmly. ‘All the boats are fast chained and padlocked to the rocks; so, unless his friend Alcibiades finds him waiting, like a second Ulysses, on the beach, I hardly see how he can take French leave.’

What are you going to do about him, Justinian?’ asked Maurice curiously.

‘I am waiting until you and Helena come to an understanding, and then I will tell Caliphronas that he has been beaten with his own weapons of treachery.’

‘Helena has gone up the mountain. Shall I await her return?’

‘By no means. Follow her at once to her favourite haunt. There is a narrow path leading to it—a glade near the Western Pass, in the centre of which is an altar inscribed ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ ΘΕΩ.’



‘Oh, I know it! Helena showed it to me some time ago. Crispin, I am going a-wooing!’

‘I wish you every success.’

‘Do you think my fortunate star is in the ascendant?’

‘You are as faint-hearted as you were last night,’ said the Demarch laughing. ‘Do you think, if I were not sure of Helena’s answer, I would send you on a fruitless errand? Go, my son; and when you and Helena come to ask my blessing, I will deal with Andros.’

‘Punic faith!’ remarked Crispin a trifle sadly.

‘Well! what would you?’ demanded the Demarch with energy. ‘Had I not made use of Andros, he would have made use of me. It is a mistake in being too honest when dealing with a scoundrel. One cannot go straight on a crooked road. If I were dealing with you, or with Maurice, I might not stoop to diplomatic lies; but as to that serpent of an Andros—pah!—the end justifies the means.’

‘Do you think he will come and see you again?’

‘Of course! He will come to demand the fulfilment of my promise, and ask me to force Helena into this distasteful marriage. Then I will reveal all, and drive him from the island.’

‘But is it wise to let him go free, seeing he is our declared enemy.’

‘What! you wish me to keep him as a hostage?’ said Justinian good-humouredly. ‘Nothing would be gained by such an act. Alcibiades intends to attack the island, with or without Andros; and the only thing this scamp can do is to urge his friend to assault Melnos at once. Everything is ready: the men are in splendid training; I have arms in plenty; and we are thirteen Englishmen, so the sooner the strife is decided the more satisfied I will be.’

‘Well, I will leave you to talk over your military schemes with Crispin,’ said Maurice, as he arose to go, ‘and meanwhile will go in search of Helena.’

‘Good luck go with you!’ cried Crispin, as he left the room; and Justinian heartily seconded the kindly wish.

It was an exquisite morning, and the sun was just below the eastern peaks of the island; but as Maurice lightly climbed up the slopes behind the Acropolis, the luminary came into view, and flooded the high elevation of snow-peaks, pine forests, and olive trees, with yellow radiance. The cup of the valley lay in shadow; but amid these lofty solitudes all was luminous light and brilliant sunshine. The little

path which led to the glade had been worn into a narrow earthen track by the light feet of Helena ; but on either side grew the long lush grass, starred with primrose, violet, anemone, and cyclamen—all delicately blooming in the warm atmosphere. From this floral carpet arose stately plane trees, arbutus, and here and there lance-shaped cypresses ; while, between the luxuriant foliage, Maurice could catch glimpses at intervals of the terraced vineyards, yellowish-green with the autumnal tints of the vine-leaves, and purple with bunches of grapes ; sometimes the white gleam of a winepress, from whence arose the merry song of peasants treading the ripe clusters ; and far overhead, seen like a vision through the ragged framework of leaves, the serrated peaks of milky hue cutting the intense azure of the sky. All this loveliness was irradiated with the strong sunlight, and steeped in the luminosity of the atmosphere, so that the variety of tints, the infinite delicacy of the colours, the almost imperceptible blendings of the one into the other, made a picture enchanting to the most careless observer. Added to this, the air, rising warm from the valley below, yet coolly tempered by the higher snows, produced an atmosphere exhilarating in the extreme ;

and a pleasant murmur of song of bird and peasant sounded on all sides, blending with the rustle of the boughs, and the gentle sigh of the wind moving innumerable leaves to airy whisperings.

It was truly wonderful how rapidly Maurice had adapted himself to the mountaineering life of Melnos; and he breasted the steep path with a vigour which had been quite foreign to him, when listless, enervated, and melancholic, in England. The ten years of artificial life in London, amid a deleterious atmosphere, surrounded by ugly houses and stony streets, had saddened and depressed his spirits; but now that he had returned to Nature for cure, her calm and soothing medicines had stilled his fretful spirit, had smoothed the wrinkles from his brow, removed the haggard anguish of his heart; and now, reinvigorated and vitalised, he felt that it was good to live. Doctors can do much, but Nature can do more; for, while physical ills are to a certain extent under the control of the former, only the latter can minister to the mind; and the intangible influence of landscape, mountain air, rustic quiet, and woodland music, on the diseased mental faculties, cannot be over-estimated in their curative powers. Wise, indeed, were the Greeks to fable how the

giant Antæus drew fresh vigour for his frame from his mother Tellus; and if we in modern days did but apply this parable of nature-cure to our crowded city populations, how infinitely less would be the physical and mental ills to be endured by our worn-out, exhausted toilers of this over-anxious age!

What wonder if the Hellenes were a joyous race, dwelling as they did in a radiant climate, amid scenes of undying beauty, in healthful communion with the Earth-spirit! They exercised the body in the palæstra, the mind in the portico, and, ever drinking in health, beauty, and the music of leaves, winds, and waves, were therefore easily able to attain and preserve that serene calm of existence, which we see stamped in vivid beauty on the faces of their marble masterpieces. The countenances of Egyptian sphinx and granite king express the awful solemnity of communion with the unseen; the rapt faces of mediæval saints a spiritual unrest to escape from the world they despised; but in the frieze of the Parthenon, in the statues of god, goddess, hero, and nymph, we but see the calm of contentment, of serene satisfaction, arising from the healthful minds and bodies of the race, whose joyous tranquillity was

the gift of Nature to her believing children. Yet we, while envying their beatitude, and desirous of emulating their intense calm, make no effort to do so ; for we leave the country, and rush to the already overcrowded cities, wrangling, toiling, worrying, striving to attain an unsatisfying end.

Wiseacres talk of the complexity of modern civilisation, of the over-population of the world, of the survival of the fittest ; but this is, so to speak, merely laying the blame of our own mistakes on the stars, for we ourselves have produced this age of unrest, which we profess to loathe. When the humours of the body run to one spot, a tumour ensues, which throws the whole system out of order ; and it is the same with the misdirected way in which we govern our modern nations. If, instead of rushing to cities, and thus begetting what may be called geographical tumours, our rustics and wearied toilers stayed in the open country, then would our civilisation become less restless, and more akin to the envied calm of Hellenic life. Food would be more plentiful, minds would be more at peace, bodies would be more healthy, and the world happier. But we will not do this ;—fired by ambition, by desire for gold, by longings for luxury, we crowd together in noisy multitudes, and turn

away from the calm serenity of Nature, who would take us to her breast and make us happy, even as she did those wiser children of old. Nature sent her herald, Wordsworth, to proclaim this truth, but alas! he piped in vain; and his songs of purity were drowned in the jingle of gold and the shouts of ambition.

These were Maurice's thoughts as he clambered up the mountain-path; and so rapt was he in his dreamings of Nature-worship, that, all unconsciously, he emerged into the glade near the western pass.

It was encircled by ilex, tamarisk, beech, and elm, woven together as in brotherhood by straggling creepers, festooned gracefully from bough to bough, from branch to branch; and in the centre, amid the flowing grass, was placed a small marble altar, on a low flight of steps. In front, the trees had been cut down, and there was a glimpse of the white houses in the valley, the waving red line of the grand staircase; and, high above, the bizarre colours of the volcanic rocks, fringed by a dark green belt of forest, from which luxuriance the arid peaks shot up into the blue sky like white marble cones. But not at valley, nor forest, nor aerial peaks looked Maurice,

for his eyes were fixed on Helena, who, robed in her favourite white, crowned with a wreath of roses, stood by the altar with a mass of brilliant flowers thereon, looking like the nymph of the place.

She flushed red with delight as Maurice drew near, and paused in her dainty task of arranging the blossoms with the air of some startled shy thing of the woodlands. Like stars her eyes, like sunshine her glinting hair, and as for her face, the roses in her wreath were scarce so delicate in hue. The lovely glade, the solemn, flower-piled altar, the beautiful priestess—it was not Melnos, it was not the nineteenth century, for this was Arcadia; and in this bird-haunted dell was Flora discovered, weaving flowers for future summers' adornment.

'Are you nymph, dryad, or oread?' he asked, pausing with one foot on the lowest step.

'No; I am Chloris, the goddess of flowers,' she answered, entering into the spirit of his jesting speech.

'Give me then, O goddess, of your treasures!'

'Violet, rose, and cyclamen! take them all,' she cried merrily, and threw a rain of many-coloured flowers on the laughing, up-turned face of the young man. Then, while he bent to pick up one crimson



bud which had fallen at his feet, she burst out into one of those old English songs her father had taught her :—

*‘ Rose and myrtle all are twining,  
In their beauty thus combining,  
To become a chaplet fair  
For my shepherd’s golden hair.  
Fa la! la! la!  
My Colin dear.’*

‘ Clearly,’ quoth Maurice, with a smile, ‘ this wreath is meant for me.’

Helena smiled, and continued both her garland-weaving and her song.

*‘ If you ask who is my dearest,  
It is he who loiters nearest ;  
And for him this chaplet fair  
Do I weave with flowerets rare.  
Fa la! la! la!  
My Colin dear.’*

‘ Better and better!’ said the lover, mounting the steps. ‘ I am nearest! I have yellow locks, so I decidedly am Colin dear!’

They were now standing on either side of the altar, with the rainbow heap of flowers between them ; and, despite Maurice’s boldness in thus coming so close to his goddess, he was now seized with a fit of shyness, which communicated itself to the sympathetic Helena, so they gazed with embarrassment at one another, tongue-tied, with burning cheeks.

‘Where is Zoe?’ asked Maurice, breaking the awkward silence.

‘Zoe,’ replied Helena demurely, ‘is assisting Dick to find more flowers.’

‘And, pray, what is Dick doing here?’

‘Aha! you must ask Zoe.’

‘I would rather ask you.’

Helena glanced at him with a laugh, then suddenly flushed crimson, and sat down on the steps, with the white lap of her gown full of flowers.

‘I am no oracle to give answers,’ she replied, carefully selecting some buds.

‘That means you are no goddess,’ said Maurice, sitting down a step lower, and looking up into her charming face. ‘Well, I prefer you as a mortal maiden. But what about Colin’s wreath?’

‘I am weaving it now.’

‘Roses for love, myrtle for joy, violets for modesty. What a charming wreath!’

‘Ah, you know the language of flowers!’

‘I know what this wreath means—“Modest love is a joy.” Am I right?’

‘Yes—no—yes—that is—Oh dear me! Is it not a lovely day?’

‘Is it not a lovely face? Very lovely.’

‘I speak of the day.’

‘And I of you.’

Decidedly Maurice was getting on capitally in the art of saying nothings which mean somethings, and Helena was woman enough to know what he was hinting at, yet also woman enough to indulge in a little coquetry. She had burnt her fingers with Caliphronas ; yet, quite forgetful of the warning, began to tease Maurice with charming persistence.

‘Am I very lovely?’

‘You are as beautiful as Helen,’ replied Maurice, rather taken aback at the directness of this question.

‘I am as beautiful as Helen! Well, I am Helen ; so you mean I am as beautiful as myself. That is not a compliment.’

‘What a vain child you are ! I am speaking of the Trojan Helen.’

‘I am not a child. I am nineteen years of age—and a woman.’

‘I believe that, for you possess all the art of a woman in tormenting a man. Where did you learn it?’

‘Learn what?’

‘The art of being cruel, kind, merry, sad, delightful yet tormenting.’

‘Do you mean to say I possess all these contradictory qualities at one and the same time?’

‘Well, you are capricious at times.’

‘Oh, indeed!’ said Helena pettishly, resuming her task. ‘Then I must be full of faults.’

‘They are very charming faults, at all events.’

‘I am not listening, Maurice. I am too busy with this wreath.’

‘My wreath.’

‘I did not say it was yours.’

‘Not in words, perhaps; but then, you see, I can read the language of the eyes.’

Helena blushed at this, but, purposely misunderstanding the hint, made demure reply.

‘Ah, you see my education has been neglected in that particular branch.’

‘Shall I teach you?’

‘I am afraid you will find me a bad pupil.’

‘I don’t mind taking that risk, Helena.’

He laid his hand on one of hers with a caressing gesture, upon which she let it remain, but snatched up a cornflower with the other.

‘Look what a beautiful blossom!’

‘It is the colour of your eyes.’

‘No, no; I mean this red rose.’

‘The tint of your cheeks.’

‘I hate compliments,’ said Helena in a dignified way, trying to release her hand from his warm grasp.

‘Always?’

‘Yes, always; unless I like the person who pays them.’

‘And in this case?’

‘I—I—don’t know.’

‘Let me read the truth in your eyes.’

She looked up with a pretty gesture of mock despair, but, meeting the tenderness of his look, dropped her eyes in confusion, while Maurice, shifting his seat, slipped his left arm round her slender waist, still holding her hand gently.

‘Helena!’

No answer.

‘Helena, do you know what your eyes tell me?’

No answer.

‘They say that you will not be cruel enough to refuse me your love.’

‘My love!’ she murmured confusedly.

‘Yes,’ he whispered passionately. ‘I said you were capricious. You are not capricious, but true, loving, and charming beyond expression—a very woman, whom I love, and who loves me in return. Helena!’

All the virginal passion of this island maiden burned like red roses in her cheeks, as Maurice drew her slender form closer to his breast, and murmured broken sentences of love in her ear.

‘I love you! I love you, Helena! I saw your face in a picture, and I loved the face; now I see the woman, and I love the woman. My dearest! my darling! say you love me just a little!’

‘I cannot say that,’ she whispered, hiding her face on his shoulder.

‘Oh, Helena!’

‘Because I love you a great deal.’

‘My darling!’

She lay in his strong arms, with her head on his shoulder, blushing with maidenly fear at the ardour of his passion; then Maurice, bending down his comely head, pressed a kiss on her lips.

‘My dearest! my own!’ he murmured rapturously; ‘how I love you! love you! love you!’

Lost in the overwhelming deeps of each other’s affection, they remained silent, filled with feelings too deep for words, too inexplicable to be translated otherwise than by sighs and glances. The delicate voices of the woodlands sounded in their ears, the brilliant colours blazed in the luminous light, the sun

shone, the birds sang—but they heard nothing, saw nothing ; for, with their hearts beating, their souls blending, their lips meeting, they were far away from this earth in the heaven of love.

There was something sacred about this outburst of passion, which sent a thrill of fear through their breasts ; for this was no vulgar affection, no sensual desire, no mere adoration of outward beauty, but a chaste union of two souls, in which the woman's melted into the man's as a dream into a dream. The virginal purity of the young girl experienced no repulsion in this case, as it had felt when near to the frank animal passion of the handsome Greek ; and Helena, exquisite blossom of maidenhood, lay in her lover's arms without shame or dread, for she knew that this clinging clasp, these broken sighs, this vivid ardour were the outcome of a love as pure and chaste as was her own ; so there she lay, cradled on his beating heart, and the birds around sang their betrothal song, as doubtless they carolled to our first parents in the garden of Eden. Time was not, earth had vanished, humanity was but an empty name, for, clinging together with passionate ardour, they were all in all to one another, and the divinity which clothed them with his splendours was no rosy, mis-

chievous urchin, with his bundle of arrows, but a terrible, unseen, unknown, unfelt deity, who now, for the first time, had permitted them to enter into his Holy of Holies, and touched with their lips the burning coals of his sacred altar.

Alas! mighty as are the pinions of Love, they weary in that divine atmosphere of transcendentalism; so, folding his wings, he ceased his song of bliss, and dropped like a tired lark to the earth. The lovers awoke from their mystic trance, and looked at one another with wide-eyed rapture; then Helena, with a happy sigh, once more laid her head on her lover's shoulder, and began to talk of earthly matters.

‘My father!’

‘Your father will be delighted, my dearest. He told me that this was the dearest wish of his heart.’

‘Ah! is he so anxious then to lose me?’

‘No, he will not lose you, my sweet queen. For when we are married we will still dwell in Melnos, and reign over it through years of happiness.’

‘My father wants you to be his successor?’

‘Yes; and to marry you. So if you fulfil the first, I will accept the second.’

‘I will marry you whenever you like,’ said beautiful



Helena, smiling through her tears. 'But will you not weary of staying here?'

'With you? never!'

'Ah, it is I who am the attraction—not Melnos!'

'It is both; but in my eyes you are before everything else in the world.'

'And if you grow tired of me?'

'I will never grow tired of you!'

Helena picked up a rose from her lap and held it up to him.

'This rose is very beautiful, but it fades. Is your love like the rose?'

'Yes; but not because the rose fades. My love is like the rose-plant itself, which renews itself afresh with every coming of summer. In this island it blooms all the year round; and my love will be the same.'

'Will you not regret your home, your money, your position?'

'My dearest, none of those things brought me happiness. I was a weary, mournful man, tired of life, tired of myself, tired of all around me; then by chance I saw your face, and it was as a star in the darkness of my night. I followed that star, and it led me to happiness, and to you!'

‘So we will live here?’

‘Till our days be ended. You will be queen, and I your very humble slave and lover. No; I do not desire to return to the world, with all its tumult, ambitions, and fret. I am weary of the crowded cities, the haggard faces, the grey skies of England. I only care to live in this lotos-land with you, my angel, to wander with you amid the fair flowers, yourself the fairest of all; to sleep at dusk with your loving arms around me, to awake at dawn under your caress; and thus to live in paradise until we meet in a still brighter paradise beyond the grave.’

‘Do we meet beyond the grave?’

‘Helena!’

‘I know nothing of religion, my dearest. Indeed, it is not my fault, for my father has always refused to answer my questions. He would not allow old Athanasius to speak to me of sacred things, and I know nothing, save that there is an Almighty Being called God.’

‘And your father?’

‘Believes the same. Look!’

She pointed to the majestic block of white marble behind her, and there was deeply sculptured the two words ‘ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ ΘΕΩ.’

‘So of old the Athenians erected an altar to *Ἀγνώστῳ Θεῷ*,’ said Maurice sadly, rather puzzled to know what to do. ‘My dearest, I am no saint, to be able to instruct you in such things ; and I am afraid my views are not what the Church would approve of. However, my dear old friend and tutor, Mr. Carriston, is, I trust, coming out here to see me ; and he will marry us, and tell you all you wish to know of sacred things.’

They had risen to their feet, and were standing looking at that solemn altar, so noble in its hugeness amid the encircling green. No relic of paganism sculptured with nude figures, with wreaths and nymphs and long-drawn pomp of Panhellenic festival, but a severely plain mass of stainless stone, with no other indication of its meaning than the mystic words ‘ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ ΘΕΩ’ cut thereon. After looking at it in silence for a few minutes, Helena gathered up her flowers in order to return home, for the sun was now at his zenith, and the heat intolerable.

‘Oh, not yet!’ entreated Maurice, anxious to prolong the sweet communion ; ‘you must make me my wreath.’

‘Are you Colin?’

‘I think so,’ he said, kissing her fondly.

‘So do I,’ she replied demurely ; ‘therefore, Colin, I will finish your garland.’

Once more she sat down on the steps and began busily wreathing the flowers together in long fragrant strings, while Maurice, lying lover-like at her feet on the flowery turf, looked ever up into the delicate beauty of her face, and wondered at his good fortune in being loved by such an enchanting divinity.

Zoe and Dick came back armed with flowers, and Dick grinned somewhat sheepishly as he saw Maurice smile. A fellow-feeling, however, makes us wondrous kind, so Maurice made no remark, but sent Zoe and her swain with their newly-gathered flowers down to the Acropolis.

‘Do you think Dick is in love with Zoe?’ asked Helena, when the laughter of the sailor and his companion had died away.

‘Do I think you are in love with me?’ retorted Maurice lazily. ‘My dearest, Dick is as much in love with that wicked little brunette, as I am with a certain charming blonde.’

‘I’m glad of that,’ said Helena complacently. ‘I do not wish to lose Zoe.’

‘You must when she marries.’

‘Oh no! If Dick becomes her husband, he will

stay here. I'm sure he would not mind, as he is very fond of you.'

'That's very kind of him, considering the battering I gave him yesterday.'

'Oh, Maurice, it was terrible!'

'For Dick?'

'No; for you.'

'Poor Dick! he got the worst of it, yet you pity me.'

'Ah, but you see I'm not engaged to Dick,' said Helena gravely, holding out a wreath to him.

'No; but Zoe is. At least, if she is not now, she soon will be. But come, Helena, fasten this wreath round my hat.'

Helena obediently did so, and then placed it on her lover's head, upon which he gave her a kiss, and insisted that she should deck herself with the remaining flowers. Nothing loath, Helena did so, and was shortly one mass of delicious bloom, from which her face peered out like some laughing dryad. Rosewreath on her golden head, green myrtle girding her slender waist, and flowers of myriad hues bedecking her dress, she looked indeed like Chloris, the goddess of flowers, to whom Maurice had so often compared her.

‘Come, my dearest,’ he said, taking her hand, ‘and I will lead the Spring down to the valley. We are not Maurice and Helena, but Florizel and Perdita, shepherd and shepherdess ; so come, my dearest, adown the mountain.’

They walked slowly along, talking all kinds of charming nonsense, and laughing merrily, he rose-wreathed like an ancient Hellene, she decked, like a goddess of the spring, with delicate blossoms, and both full of mirth and joy and happiness, which bubbled from their lips in gushes of liquid song.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### PUNIC FAITH.

*'Tis difficult, when dealing with a knave,  
To know what course of conduct to pursue,  
Yet if to win the victory you crave,  
Strict honesty you must perforce eschew ;  
Like him, all craftily you must behave,  
Or else he certainly will conquer you.  
This golden rule remember when you meet him,  
A scoundrel's weapons must be used to beat him.*



T took Caliphronas some considerable time to recover his usual serenity of temper, as never during his whole life had his vanity received such a blow as this refusal of Helena's to marry him. Hitherto the Greek had been so much petted by all on account of his beauty, especially by women, that he had become quite a spoiled child, and looked upon it as his right that every whim he took into his handsome head should be gratified. To express a wish, and have it at once fulfilled, appeared

to him to be only his just due, and it was a severe wound to his arrogant self-complacency to find that the only woman he cared about should refuse to yield to the dearest wish of his heart.

His love for Helena was purely a sensual feeling, based on the feminine beauty of the girl, so, when he found himself scorned in such a way, this animal affection speedily merged in the stronger feeling of intense hatred. Formerly he had regarded Helena as a charming toy, who would do him credit as his wife, and satisfy his artistic requirements by her womanly grace ; but now he regarded her in the light of a bitter enemy, one who deserved to be punished for the infamous way in which she had slighted his addresses. Nothing would have given Caliphronas greater gratification than to have marred that lovely face he had so much admired, and he would have liked to have dragged Helena through the gutter, and rendered her an object of pity and derision to all the world, in order to satiate his vengeance against her.

Had he been a Turkish bashaw, he would doubtless have tied up the offending beauty in a sack and dropped her into the Bosphorus ; had he been a Russian boyar, he would have done his best to have had her exiled to Siberia ; but, as he was neither the one



nor the other, and was in his present position quite unable to treat her as cruelly as he would have wished, with devilish ingenuity he hit upon the only mode in which he could hope to gratify his petty spite against a woman, whose only crime was that she did not admire him as much as he admired himself.

The Count's little scheme of revenge was not complex, as he merely intended to call upon Justinian to keep his word, and force his daughter into the marriage, and, once she was his wife, punish her in a way of which he felt himself thoroughly capable, that is, by worrying her to death. A petty, spiteful, narrow-minded man like the Greek had quite a gift for annoying those people whom he disliked, and by assiduously exercising this ignoble talent, could hope to render unbearable the life of even the happiest and most long-suffering person. Besides, if he grew tired of Helena, he could easily force her to leave Melnos, for her father was so old that he would soon be in his dotage, and thus could not protect the girl, in which case Caliphronas would be free to act as his spiteful nature dictated.

As to Justinian's breaking faith with him, such a thing never entered into the Count's mind for a moment, and, scoundrel as he was himself, he hardly

dreamed that any one would be astute enough to beat him with his own weapons, least of all the Demarch, who had hitherto acted towards him in a strictly honourable way. Strong diseases, however, require strong remedies, and, had the deceiving of Caliphronas not been imperative for the salvation of the island, Justinian would certainly not have stooped to such duplicity. Caliphronas, therefore, ready to betray the Demarch if the fancy took him, never thought the Demarch would betray him, and thus relied blindly on the promise of the forced marriage being fulfilled, in which case this consummate scamp decided to sacrifice Helena in the most painful manner which he could devise, for the gratification of his wounded pride.

That Maurice loved Helena he knew well enough, for had not the mere sight of that lovely face brought the young man from England to this semi-civilised island of the *Ægean* ; but as to whether the passion was reciprocated, Caliphronas felt doubtful, as he had never espied anything in the girl's demeanour towards his rival to inspire him with such a belief. But whether she loved this young Englishman or not, the Count was quite indifferent, as he had Justinian's promise that, with her consent or without it, Helena should be his. As it turned out, the marriage, if it

took place, would be without her consent, but this the Greek deemed a small matter, and therefore repaired to the Acropolis with the full determination to force the Demarch to keep his word. It was in this rosy light that Caliphronas looked at the circumstances of the case, and he never thought of what he should do in the event of things turning out otherwise, for the simple reason that, in his blind arrogance, he deemed himself too powerful to be thwarted in any way; so, disguising his chagrin under an air of triumph, he went in the afternoon to meet Justinian, and his fate.

Strolling along the mulberry tree avenue, Caliphronas, anticipating quite a brilliant career of scoundrelism, began to build castles in the air, which were all inhabited by one person—himself. Justinian was old, and would soon die, or, at all events, putting his much-desired death out of the question, would shortly become incapable of managing the affairs of the island, therefore this goodly heritage would soon revert to Count Constantine Caliphronas, better known as Andros, the shepherd boy. This humble birth, however, he would sink in oblivion, and become widely known as Prince Caliphronas, the sole survivor of a famous Fanariot family. Helena, of course, he would marry, in order to revenge himself, and when

he grew weary of her beauty and his revenge, there were plenty of ways of getting her shipped off to Stamboul, where she could be finally disposed of in some jealously-guarded harem. Then he would be sole ruler of the Isle of Melnos, and make it a dwelling after his own heart, for, after turning both Crispin and the Englishman off the island, he would set up a princely establishment in this Ægean paradise.

With the exports of wines, silks, pottery, olives, and grapes, he would be able to realise a magnificent income, which he would apply, not to the aid and assistance of the Melnosians, but to his own enjoyment. He would build a palace, have troops of servants, a pleasure yacht, and could also give rein to his sensuality in the matter of the most beautiful women. As to carrying out Justinian's foolish dream of a new Hellas, of course that was ridiculous, and his first act on becoming Demarch of Melnos would be to abolish the three days' festival, so that the Melnosians could live like the other insular Greeks, on such amusements as they could provide for themselves. Besides, the title Demarch only meant Mayor, and was hardly lordly enough for such a magnificent person as he intended to be. He would call himself Prince of Melnos, and who knows

but that, with the assistance of Alcibiades and a few other scoundrels of the same kidney with whom he was acquainted, he would not be able to extend his principality so as to include all the surrounding islands. Then Crete, under Turkish misrule, would be glad to come under his protection, and Rhodes also—in fact, a few years might see the whole Cyclades acknowledging him as their sovereign. In that case, he would be powerful enough to measure himself against the Greek Government, who, perhaps, weary of a foreign king, might be persuaded or forced to drive away King George, and place the Prince of Melnos on the vacant throne.

In fact, while indulging in these Alnaschar-like visions, Caliphronas was rapidly foreseeing the conquest of Constantinople, and himself seated on the golden throne of the Palæologi, as Emperor of the East, when the sight of the Acropolis, directly in front of him, dispelled these glowing dreams, and he ascended the steps rather dolefully, with the conviction that, as yet, all his fine schemes were in the clouds.

Pausing a moment on the threshold, in order to quite recover his usual jaunty manner, the future Emperor, but present adventurer, drew aside the curtain and entered the court, to find himself con-

fronted by Justinian, his daughter, and their two guests. The old Demarch reclined in a capacious chair beside the fountain, smoothing the golden hair of Helena, who was seated at his feet. On the back of the chair leaned Maurice, laughing at some trivial remark, and Crispin, balanced perilously on the marble rim of the pool, was irritating Argos, who strutted near with his gorgeous tail spread out to its fullest extent. All of them looked remarkably happy, especially Justinian, whose stern face was glowing with pleasure, and in Helena's eyes shone the light of undying love as she glanced shyly, from time to time, at her joyous lover, so strong, so handsome, and so noble.

When Caliphronas appeared at the entrance, however, all this merriment vanished ; for Helena, mindful of the previous night, sprang to her feet, with an indignant look at the advancing Greek, and the faces of Maurice and the poet assumed a cold expression of keen disapproval. Not so Justinian, who, quite enjoying the situation, received his enemy with a bland smile, which, had Caliphronas but known it, boded ill for the success of his mission.

‘ Helena, my child,’ said the Demarch quietly, ‘ will you leave us for a little while. I have some business with Count Caliphronas.’

Helena needed no second bidding, but, with an angry glance at her rejected lover, walked quickly to the curtains, through which she vanished, but not before sending a sweet smile in the direction of Maurice. Caliphronas saw that smile, and felt uneasy as to the meaning of it, but he became still more uneasy, when the Demarch, without asking him to be seated, addressed him formally as Count Caliphronas.

‘Why do you not call me Andros?’ asked the Greek apprehensively.

‘I understood you called yourself Count Caliphronas,’ replied Justinian smoothly, ‘and, naturally, I give you that title. Of course, I thought you were but a shepherd boy, who, in default of god-parents, had to be called by the name of your birthplace. However, I am wrong, as it seems you are the offspring of a noble family, and have a title.’

‘I don’t know what you mean by talking to me like this!’ said the Count in rather a cowed manner, feeling that the speech of the Demarch was decidedly hostile in tone. ‘I wish to speak to you alone.’

‘You can speak to me in the presence of these gentlemen,’ retorted the old man coolly; ‘they know all my secrets.’

‘All?’ said Caliphronas in a meaning tone.

‘So far as you are concerned—yes!’

‘Beware, Justinian!’ cried the Count in Greek, whereupon the Demarch ruthlessly interrupted him.

‘You had better speak English. I prefer it.’

This was quite the dictatorial Demarch of old, strangely unlike the yielding Justinian of the last few weeks, so Caliphronas, feeling more and more uneasy, burst out into a torrent of rapid English.

‘What do you mean? Why do you talk like this? Have you forgotten your promise to me?’

‘What promise?’

‘Your promise that I should marry Helena!’

‘Oh yes, yes! I remember something about that. Well, have you asked her to marry you?’

‘I have, and she has refused me,’ said Caliphronas sullenly.

‘In that case, I am afraid you cannot marry her.’

‘Cannot marry her!’ stammered Caliphronas, the rich colour of his face fading to a dull grey; ‘but you promised to make her marry me.’

‘Did I? then I break that promise!’

‘You break it! And what about my succeeding you as Demarch of Melnos.’

‘I break that also!’

Caliphronas, too startled to speak, stood looking



blankly at the Demarch, pale as the marble pillar against which he leaned. Much as he disliked him, Maurice could not but feel sorry for the shame and agony felt by the baffled schemer. Twice, thrice, he tried to answer Justinian, but the words died away feebly on his parched lips, while the Demarch, relentless in his anger, spoke cruelly and deliberately, as if to torture still further the wretched man before him.

‘You are astonished at my thus acting so dishonourably. I am astonished myself, as never before have I broken a promise once made, even to the meanest person. However, in this case, necessity demanded that I should make use of you as a tool, in order to gain my own ends, and I have done so, with the fullest intention of defeating your schemes. Ah yes, my dear friend, I know perfectly well that you would have betrayed me to Alcibiades, had I not, by a stroke of diplomacy, secured you to my interests, by promising to give you my daughter and make you my successor. Had I not done so, you would have joined the ranks of my enemies, and I, being ignorant of their schemes, would have been at a disadvantage in defending my property. Therefore, knowing you were ready to play the traitor, unless bribed to remain true to your benefactor, you can hardly wonder that I made use of

you, to learn the plans of those who were dangerous to me in every way. A man cannot serve two masters, and as the question of whose side you would embrace was simply one of bribery, I took advantage of your baseness. I bribed you ! I promised you all you wished, without the slightest intention of fulfilling such promise. From you I have learned all I wish to know, and am now in a position to baffle both your ambition and that of Alcibiades. Between two stools you have fallen ignominiously to the ground ; and now, having no further use for you, traitor and ingrate as you are, I command you to leave my island this very day.'

During this long speech the Greek made neither sound nor movement, but, like a beaten hound, cowered before the lash of Justinian's scornful words. When the Demarch ended, he raised his head with a bitter smile on his pallid face, and flung out his hand threateningly towards the speaker.

'You do well, Justinian, to say you are prepared,' he said in a hoarse voice ; 'you do well to be on your guard ; for I swear by the Panagia herself to ruin you and your schemes before the end of another month. Had you been true to me, I would have remained true to you ; but now'—

‘Most virtuous scoundrel!’ cried Justinian scornfully; ‘you were anxious to guard what you thought was already your own, and now make a boast of doing that which you were bribed to do. As to your threat to ruin me, go and do your worst! I defy both you and your precious friend Alcibiades!’

‘You have every reason to be grateful to me. I have told you all the schemes of your enemies.’

‘Yes; you betrayed them as you would have betrayed me, had their bribe been the larger. Gratitude! gratitude! you dare to speak of that to me, to whom you owe everything! Who were you? Nobody! What were you? Nothing! I found you a poor rustic in the Island of Andros, and trained you up to be my successor—which you would have been, had I not discovered in time your heartless, fickle, scoundrelly nature. Gratitude, forsooth! and you, ingrate, turning to bite the hand that has fed you all these years. You owe me everything, I owe you nothing, save the contempt that an ungrateful hound like you deserves for such treachery as you meditated. You would have sold me, you Judas! you would have betrayed a man who has been a father to you! But I have baffled you! I have tricked you! and you are now reaping the reward

of your own vile actions. Go! quit my sight, ungrateful wretch! lest I pass from words to actions, and spurn you from the threshold which your very presence pollutes.'

'I will go,' cried the Greek, with venomous spitefulness; 'but I will return, with an army at my back to ruin you and yours. I will wreck your island, I will make of you a slave; and as for your daughter'—

'Not a word about that lady,' said Maurice firmly, stepping forward and taking part in the conversation for the first time; 'she is to be my wife!'

'Your wife!' hissed the Greek furiously. 'Never! never! I will drag that fine piece of purity from your arms to the gutter. I will'—

'You d—d reptile!' cried the Englishman, white with passion; 'say another word, and I'll break your neck!'

Caliphronas, having had some experience of Roylands' strength, judged it wise not to say another word; but, turning on his benefactor, poured out the vials of his wrath on the old man's head.

'So this is why you brought him from England!' he said fiercely; 'to marry Helena! You promised that if I fulfilled your desire, and lured him to Melnos, I would be your daughter's husband'—

‘If she accepted you, yes—if she refused you, no!’

‘So you say now. Oh, I have been your tool and slave all along!’

‘You have. I have met treachery with treachery, and baffled you.’

‘I have obeyed your wishes,’ hissed the Greek venomously; ‘I have kept your secrets, but I will do so no longer. Who you are, and what you are, I will tell this man.’

‘Be silent, wretch!’

‘I will not be silent; I have been silent too long. You have betrayed me, so now I will betray you. Maurice Roylands, look at this so-called Justinian. Do you know who he is? An outcast Englishman, a renegade adventurer—your uncle Rudolph!’

‘My uncle Rudolph!’ replied Maurice, aghast.

‘Yes. It was he who sent me to England for you; it is he who is heir to your fine estate; and you—you are nothing but a pauper!’

‘Crispin, turn that man out!’ commanded the Demarch rising. ‘Go to the western pass, Count Caliphronas, and there you will find a boat in charge of Alexandros. Leave this island before nightfall, or, by heaven, I will have you drowned like the rat you are!’

‘I go,’ retorted the Greek fiercely, retreating before Crispin, and clutching the curtains. ‘I go; but when I return, I swear by all the saints that you shall suffer agonies for every word you have uttered to-day. Scoundrel! wretch! renegade! outcast! *Và, và!*’

And, uttering the bitterest malediction he could think of, the beaten schemer vanished from the Acropolis, and later on from the island itself; from whence he doubtless went to Kamila, in search of Alcibiades, to assist him in his plans of revenge.

‘Thank heaven, that is all over!’ said Justinian, when they were once more alone. ‘Now, at least, it will be open war, and not hidden treachery. Maurice!’

‘And you are really my uncle Rudolph?’ said Roylands, grasping the outstretched hand of the Demarch.

‘Really and truly! Now you know the meaning of so many things which have so often puzzled you. Did you never suspect the truth?’

‘Never!’ answered his nephew emphatically; ‘but Crispin’—

‘Crispin knew it all along,’ said the poet quickly; ‘but, as I had given my sacred word to keep silence, of course I could say nothing.’

‘I am glad you are my uncle, Justinian.’

‘Oh, I am still Justinian, then!’ said Rudolph, with a smile, as he shook his nephew heartily by the hand. ‘Well, it is better so; I am too old to learn new tricks, and, after forty years of Greek life, I cannot turn Englishman in one moment.’

‘Of course Roylands Grange is now yours.’

‘Boy, boy,’ observed the old Demarch, laying his hand on the young man’s shoulder, ‘do you think so meanly of me as that? Were I a pauper, I would not deprive you of a single acre; but, being as I am, rich and happy, I would indeed be base to take your estate when I have all this.’

‘Still, you are the head of our house.’

‘A head that will soon be in the grave. No, no, my son, the property is yours; and if you have any scruples, why, then, are you not going to marry your cousin? so the Grange will still belong to you, and yet remain with the elder branch of the family.’

‘Why, Helena is my first cousin!’

‘Of course she is!’

‘A second Eunice,’ said Crispin smiling, ‘only not so charming.’

‘Crispin! Helena is the most beautiful woman in the world!’

‘So is Eunice.’

‘Come, that’s nonsense, you know!’ objected Maurice warmly; ‘there can’t be two most beautiful women in the world.’

Justinian settled the matter by bursting out laughing.

‘Every one thinks their own crow the whitest,’ he said gaily; ‘but come, leave off arguing about the merits of your respective lady-loves. We have other things to think of.’

‘The coming war, eh?’

‘Yes. Andros will do as he says, and bring Alcibiades here with all his band of scoundrels. Well,’ added the Demarch, with a grim smile, ‘they will get a rather warm reception when they do come. The Roylands are a fighting family.’

‘Ah, now I understand how you made that allusion before,’ said Maurice quickly; ‘and now I come to think of it, what with the many hints you dropped, I must have been blind not to have guessed the truth.’

‘When a man has been numbered with the dead forty years, it is hard to believe that he is alive,’ said the Demarch philosophically.

‘You must have had a strange life, uncle.’

‘Very,’ replied Justinian, gratified by the title.



‘To-night, when Helena has retired to bed, I will tell you all my adventures since leaving the Grange.’

‘Does Helena know I am her cousin?’

‘She knows nothing beyond the fact that I am Demarch of Melnos. No, my son, you have wooed and won your bride entirely on your merits, so now you can understand how delighted I am at the prospect of this marriage, which will blend both the elder and younger branch of the family in one common line.’

‘Can I tell Helena?’

‘Certainly, whenever you please.’

‘Here is Helena now,’ said Crispin, as the girl, looking rather pale, entered the court. ‘Come here, sister Helena; Maurice has something to tell you.’

‘About Caliphronas?’ asked Helena, coming up close to her father.

‘No, my dear,’ said her father, kissing her fondly. ‘Caliphronas has received the reward of his treachery, and has left Melnos for ever.’

‘I am glad of that, father,’ said the girl, with a sigh of relief. ‘You can have no idea how I disliked him. But has he been treacherous?’

‘Very; he wanted to give up Melnos to Alcibiades.’

‘Did he dare?’

‘Yes ; and was only deterred from doing so by being promised both yourself and the island.’

‘But, father,’ cried Helena in great distress, ‘you did not want me to marry Caliphronas?’

‘Never ! I wished you to marry Maurice.’

‘Well, your wishes are going to be fulfilled,’ said Helena, with a lovely smile, turning to her lover.

‘Helena,’ remarked Maurice with mock solemnity, taking her hands, ‘look at me carefully.’

‘I am doing so with both eyes.’

‘Do you know who I am?’

‘Of course—Maurice Roylands.’

‘And what else?’

‘My—my future husband,’ said the girl, with an amused smile.

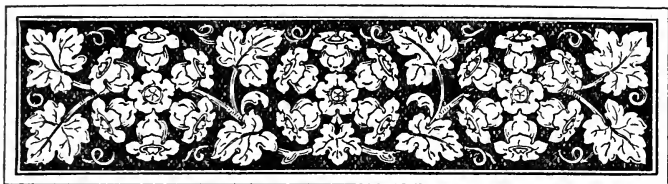
‘Still, I am something even more.’

‘I don’t understand,’ began Helena in bewilderment, when Justinian interposed.

‘Do not tease the child so, Maurice. Helena, this is your future husband and your first cousin.’

‘My cousin !’

‘By all the laws of the Medes and Persians,’ said Maurice, kissing her. ‘Your father is my long-lost uncle Rudolph, of whom I have spoken, and you, my sweet bride to be, are my dear coz Helena.’



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A ROLLING STONE.

*In olden days folks mostly stayed at home,  
Nor e'er in quest of unknown lands departed,  
And tho' some ne'er-do-weels at times would roam,  
They came back poorer than the day they started:  
From which disastrous lives there comes alone  
That foolish proverb of a rolling stone.*

*If such advice in earnest we obeyed,  
Its narrow views would certainly benumb us ;  
The progress of the world would be delayed,  
For lack of Marco Polo and Columbus !  
They tore aside the veil which hid our eyes,  
And showed us unknown worlds and unknown skies.*

*So now that proverb trite is obsolete ;  
Our enterprise has made far lands alluring,  
And north and south our fellow-men we meet,  
With Cook and Gaze in restless parties touring.  
A rolling stone gains something for its loss,  
And polish is more valuable than moss.*



N due time Alexandros came back to the Acropolis, and reported that Caliphronas had left the island in a small boat, and when last seen his craft was running before the

wind in the direction of Kamila. On hearing this, Justinian had no doubt but that the Greek was on his way to stir up Alcibiades to immediate action ; therefore resolved to lose no time in putting Melnos in a thorough state of defence. In the meantime, he placed a strong guard at the gate of the tunnel and in the Western Pass, so as to prevent the island being taken by surprise. At all events, there was no special necessity for prompt action, as Caliphronas had only departed that day, and in all probability Alcibiades would not attack Melnos for at least one week.

Privately, Maurice wondered if the Greek, adrift in a small boat, would succeed in reaching land safely, as, judging from his terror on the night of the shipwreck, he had not much pluck in foul weather. The sky, however, was perfectly clear, and there was no chance of the castaway being caught in a storm, so Justinian laughed at the fears of his nephew, and bade him set his mind at peace. Caliphronas, he said, knew the waters of the Ægean Sea well, he had but a few miles to sail before reaching Kamila, and once there he would doubtless meet with some of Alcibiades' followers to guide him to their chief. In his innermost heart, the old Demarch rather regretted that Caliphronas should thus escape safely, and would

not have grieved much had the treacherous scamp been drowned in the sea, instead of reaching Alcibiades without harm, and stirring up that accomplished cut-throat to immediate war. There was no chance, however, of such an event happening, and Justinian quite expected within the week to see the Melnosian waters covered with the boats of his bitter enemies.

Helena was much astonished and delighted to find that Maurice was her cousin, and though she could scarcely be more in love with him than she already was, yet felt that this bond of blood-relationship bound him to her by a nearer and dearer tie than even that of her future husband. They talked of a thousand things in connection with their future life, but neither of them dreamed of returning to the family seat in England, but hoped, when this war-cloud had blown over, to pass the rest of their lives untouched by sorrow in this lotos-land of the East. Maurice, in common with Crispin, was anxiously expecting letters from home, but as yet none had reached them; so to all appearances it looked as though they would be blockaded in the island by the pirates before any communication arrived at Syra.

On the day of Caliphronas' departure, however,

they were thinking but little of these things, as Maurice was anxious to learn the history of his uncle ; while Rudolph Roylands on his part—now being able to talk freely of himself, owing to the revelation of his identity—was desirous of hearing all about his late brother, the ancestral estate, and the present position of the Roylands family. He did not want to speak of these things before Helena, as he judged the girl had undergone quite enough excitement for the present, and, besides, there were many things in his own career of which he did not care to speak of before this innocent child.

Justinian was not a bad man ; but, having one of those restless, adventurous spirits, whose impulsiveness leads them into strange scrapes, had during his sojourn in the Levant indulged in many escapades, which, if not exactly criminal, were yet daring and lawless enough to startle a sober-minded person. The serious Justinian of the present was very different from the dashing Rudolph of the past ; and as his daughter knew him only in his reverend old age, and respected him as the wisest, kindest, and best of men, he naturally did not want to disturb that feeling by a narration of the wild adventures of his somewhat scampish youth.

Therefore it was not until Helena had retired to rest that he told Maurice his story; and the three men sat up till nearly morning; the elder talking in the Arabian Night vein, and the two younger listening with rapt attention to the fascinating career of this free-lance of the Middle Ages, born by some strange chance among the respectabilities of the nineteenth century. Passionate as Benvenuto Cellini, ambitious as the first Napoleon, reckless as Cæsar Borgia, and fascinating as Lord Byron, this extraordinary being possessed all those vices, virtues, charm, and astuteness, which we find, not in our military machines of to-day, but in those brilliant adventurers of the Renaissance, who burned fiercely over the troubled world of those days like wandering stars; terribly grand to look upon, but carrying destruction and dread everywhere as they swept onward in their fatal path.

After supper Helena retired, and Justinian went with his guests into the cool court, where they comfortably seated themselves under the star-strewn sky with coffee and tobacco. But the coffee grew cold and the tobacco burned untasted to ashes, as Maurice and Crispin, with their elbows on their knees, leaned forward to listen to the wondrous story of this modern

Ulysses, who had seen many lands, known many people, and had done many reckless, wild deeds during his stormy career.

Justinian himself grew excited like an old war-horse, as he told of his early life ; and it was easily seen that his spirit was as dauntless as ever, that a thirst for adventure still possessed his soul, and that he chafed bitterly at the inglorious ease to which his frail body condemned him. His bright eyes flashed at the memories of his hot youth, and his grand voice pealed trumpet-like through the still air, as he strode up and down before his enthralled listeners, reciting deeds of derring-do done in the times that had been.

‘Yes, those were grand days in Bolivia,’ he said, resuming his seat, after an outburst of stormy passion, as old memories awoke in his brain. ‘I feel carried away to the past when I talk of them. If Jumez had only brought his troops up in time, I might have been President of a South American Republic instead of Demarch of Melnos. Well, at all events, my late years have been peaceful enough ; and as President I would have had but a stormy time, ending, very likely, in a violent death.’

‘And after you left South America, uncle?’

‘I came back to England in a sailing vessel. There



was a mutiny on board of her, which I and three other fellows managed to quell ; but we held our lives in our hands all the way until we got to England. When I left the ship, I went down to Roylands in disguise, to look after my people, and found them all happy. I had not killed your father, as I had feared ; and he was now married to Rose. They seemed happy enough, so I had not the heart to disturb them. It would have been no pleasure to me to have taken the estate from Austin, as I had plenty of that treasure I found in Bolivia, and the life of a country gentleman was irksome to me. Besides, the woman I had loved so fondly was now my brother's wife ; so I had nothing to gain by revealing myself. I strayed about the old place for a time, and then returned to London, in order to think of my future. I was very wealthy, in the prime of life, and anxious for adventure, so at first I thought of returning to the army, but on reflection I decided that my first experience of soldiering had been quite enough, so turned my attention to travelling, and went all over Europe, which tour I found but tame work. Asia was more exciting, however ; and I had some good tiger-hunting in India. When I left that place, I went down Cape Town way, and explored the southern wilds of Africa,

which were even more savage than they are now. I got this wound there in a row with the niggers.'

He drew up his sleeve, and showed a white cicatrice on his arm, which must have been a dangerous wound ; and then began to tell of his African adventures, of battles with savage tribes, of explorings in unknown wilds, fights with wild beasts, elephant hunts, witchcraft ceremonies of the Obi kind, until the listeners did not know at which to marvel most, his memory or the bizarre existence he had led.

'I had five years of that sort of thing,' he went on, after a pause, 'and it became rather tiresome. Besides, I was then thirty-five years of age, and thought it was best to settle down, but where I could not make up my mind. He who has prairie fever once always gets it again, and it sends him off on his travels into the wilds as if he were stung by the gadfly of Io. What I wanted was some big work to keep my mind and body busy ; but, with all my wealth, I really did not see where I could find such occupation. True, I might have remained in Africa, and become a kind of savage king ; but, with all my buccaneering leanings, I had intellect enough to despise such rusting away in tropical forests beyond the reach of civilisation. I wished to exercise my brain as well as my body ; yet,

in spite of all my hard thinking, no scheme appeared feasible enough to give me work, interest, and pleasure when I had passed the meridian of life. England I disliked returning to, as a cramped existence in that grey little island would have sent me mad ; and unless I had asserted my right to Roylands, and entered Parliament, I did not see how I could employ my time. Besides, I was averse to disturbing Austin ; and the prejudices I would meet with on all sides from narrow-minded stay-at-homes would have sent me back again to a savage life. Unlike the Genii in the *Arabian Nights*, I could not go back to my jar after once being released therefrom.

‘England, therefore, being out of the question, I had serious thoughts of returning to South America, and exploring the Orinoco river, where they say all sorts of buried cities, civilised Indians, and golden temples are to be found. Then, changing my mind, I almost decided to go to San Francisco, and have a try at gold-digging. Feeling doubtful of this undertaking, I fancied Australia, where fortunes were being made up Ballarat way, would suit me ; but this idea I also abandoned. I did not wish to make my fortune, as I already had more money than I knew what to do with ; and it was all safely invested

in England. You see, Maurice, I had the price of my army commission, which was no great sum, my mother's fortune, which was considerable, and also that enormous Incas treasure I dug up near Lake Titicaca, which nearly cost me my life, as I told you ; so you can fancy I was quite a millionaire long before the days of Chicago pig-sticking and Pennsylvanian oil wells.'

'How did you decide to come to the Ægean?'

'Well, that came about in a queer sort of way,' said the Demarch, lighting his pipe. 'When I was up at Zanzibar, which was about as far north as I had then got, I met a poor devil of a Greek who was starving, so took him about with me as a kind of companion. He had been mixed up in the War of Independence, and got on the wrong side of King Otho, who was, at that time, ruling Greece about as badly as it could be ruled. My Greek had a dream of reviving the old Hellenic learning ; but with the country under a Bavarian king, and overrun with brigands, he did not see how this could be done. I told him of my desire to find something to occupy my mind and body ; so he suggested, as I had such a lot of money, I ought to try and start a little kingdom of my own on an intellectual basis. The idea took my fancy greatly,

as I was always of an administrative turn of mind ; and then he told me about this island of Melnos, and how it could be cultivated, fortified, and made into a kind of Elysium by a man with capital. After some deliberation I decided to do this, and pose as a second Lord Byron ; therefore, with my Greek, I went up the coast in a trading vessel, and into the Red Sea. It was very uncivilised in those days, and we had all kinds of adventures, in one of which my poor Hellene was knocked on the head ; so I was left to battle my way on alone over the isthmus to the Mediterranean.'

'I wonder you were not killed.'

'I was pretty nearly,' rejoined Justinian grimly ; 'especially up Suez way. Of course, at that time, there was no canal, and no Suez ; but I managed somehow to get across the isthmus to Alexandria. I need not tell you all my adventures from the time I left Zanzibar, as it would take too long ; but they were just as exciting as the Bolivian escapades, if not quite as bloodthirsty.'

'You ought to publish a book of your career.'

'My dear Crispin, they would call me a second Baron Munchausen, for many of my adventures would seem impossible in these tame days of Cook's tourist parties. The thirties were a great falling off

from the buccaneering times, but in these days the thirties seem quite bloodthirsty; and where the next generation of born adventurers, such as I was, will find scope for the exercise of their talents, I am sure I do not know.'

'Well, uncle, and what did you do after Alexandria?'

'I came on to Athens to see about my new Hellas. There I hired a kind of small schooner, and, with picked men, went down among the islands, until I came across Melnos. I recognised it from the description of the Greek at Zanzibar; and, having landed, climbed up over the peaks. When I saw this valley, I was enchanted, for it was indeed a fortress, formed by the hand of Nature herself. True, at first I hesitated about establishing a colony in the crater of an extinct volcano, for one never knew when it might break out again. However, when I saw this Temple of Hephaistos, I felt pretty safe, as the crater must have been extinct when it was built by the old Hellenes, thousands of years before. So I thought, if the volcano had kept quiet since the days of Pericles, it would surely keep quiet for the next thousand years.'

'And probably will!'

‘I hope so ; at least I have seen no signs of eruption ; besides, there is a vent for the volcanic forces at Santorin, so that ought to preserve Melnos intact for ever. Well, as I said, I saw this island, found it suitable for my proposed scheme, and went back to Athens, to buy it of the Greek Government. There I was told the island belonged to Turkey, as the Greek tributary islands only extend as far down as Santorin. Nothing daunted, I went to Stamboul, and, after about a year’s hard work, managed to buy Melnos for a good round sum—it was a pretty stiff price, I can tell you, but my Incas treasure proved equal to it, and even when I had paid down the money, I still found myself with plenty in hand with which to start my colony.’

‘So Melnos is absolutely your own?’

‘Absolutely ! I can leave it to whom I please. It is my private estate, and, as I have always kept friends with the Sublime Porte, there is no chance of it being taken from me. When you succeed me here, Maurice, you will find everything drawn out, fair and square, with my lawyers in London.’

‘What ! have you not the Sultan’s firman here?’

‘No. London is safer ; for even if Alcibiades were to take the island, I can still prove my right to it by

my papers in London. I paid too sweetly for it to those greedy Turks, not to take all precautions to keep my title safely stowed away, where it would meet with no accidents. London is the safest city in the world for the preservation of such things ; so in London I placed all papers recognising my right to the ownership of this island.'

'Well, uncle, now you had your new Rome, but what about the citizens?'

'Oh, as to that, I did not find any difficulty in obtaining plenty of men eager to settle down under my protection. In those days, what with Turkish misrule, pirates at sea, and brigands on land, the islanders fared badly enough, and when I promised such as became my subjects absolute immunity from such ills, the difficulty I found was as to quality, not quantity. It was the pure Hellenic stock I wanted, from which to develop my new learning, and there is a good deal of mixed blood, even among these insular Greeks. However, by careful selection, I managed to get together a goodly number of pure-blooded males, and these brought their wives and sweethearts to my island colony. Children and old men I would not have, as the latter were useless for my purpose ; and with regard to children, I wanted



to regulate the births myself, so as to keep the new race up to my standard. In time, I populated Melnos according to my mind, and then set my new subjects to work on dwellings and industries. First, I repaired this temple for my own accommodation, and arranged my system of government ; planted mulberry trees, obtained silkworms, built factories, and so on. Olives, vineyards, and currant vines, I also planted, and after a few years they began to flourish greatly, so gradually I established a commerce with the surrounding islands, and thus Melnos, by its exports, was able to earn an income for itself. What with keeping the island going in its infancy, buying what was required for my people, and carrying out engineering occupations, my capital, large as it was, had dwindled considerably, and I was delighted when I found that from all my outlay I was now realising an income sufficient not only to carry out further works, but also to leave a surplus, which I saved up against bad seasons. Every year I devote part of the income derived from my industries to public works in connection with the place and the people, and the balance I place out at interest in London.'

'Still London!'

'Well, you would not have me risk all my hard

earnings in Athens, would you? A commercial crisis, a revolution, a war, and where would my money be; while London, though liable to commercial depression, is at least safe as regards the other two contingencies. No! year after year, I have sent my money to England, and now Melnos has an assured income which would keep her going, even though she earned nothing for many years.'

'And have you been to England since you settled here?'

'Yes,' replied the Demarch with a half sigh. 'I went once, in order to arrange about the safe investment of my Melnosian moneys, and remained in London some months. When I returned, I brought back your mother, Crispin, and you.'

'My mother!' echoed Crispin with a deep flush; 'and her name?'

'I cannot tell you that now,' answered Justinian a trifle sadly; 'but when all these troubles are over, I will do so.'

'Why not now?'

'I have a reason for not doing so.'

Crispin did not like this further putting off, but he knew Justinian was iron when once he had made up his mind, so submitted to the further procrastination

of the important secret with a sufficiently good grace, although he made one objection.

‘You might be killed in the meantime.’

‘If that happens, you will find all papers necessary to establish your legitimacy with my London solicitors. You think I am harsh and unkind, Crispin, in not telling you what you wish to know now, but, when I reveal all, you will see I have a good reason for my not doing so. One thing I can comfort you with, however,—your father is alive, and I will restore you to his arms.’

‘And my mother?’

‘She is dead. You know she died here, my boy. It is a sad story I will have to tell you, but, at all events, you will have a father, and a name as good as any in England.’

‘With that promise I am content,’ said Crispin gladly; ‘as you have brought me up from infancy, I would be indeed ungrateful if I did not trust you to the end.’

‘Yet you left me in anger!’

‘I think you must blame Caliphronas for that. It was his machinations that caused you to misjudge me, as I misjudged you.’

‘Caliphronas has been the bad genius of us all,’ said

Justinian decisively ; 'but now, thank heaven, he is gone, and will trouble us no more.'

'My faith !' cried Maurice lightly, 'he will trouble us a good deal, if he brings Alcibiades here.'

'Ah, that is open war ! I do not mind that. It was his hidden treachery to which I referred.'

'By the way,' said Roylands meditatively, 'I suppose that Caliphronas thinks you have untold treasures in this Acropolis ?'

'He does ; and that is one of the reasons he desires to plunder Melnos. Fortunately, all my money derived from the island is in London.'

'What a disappointment for Alcibiades & Co., when they find no treasure here !' cried Crispin laughing.

'They must never get here,' said the Demarch resolutely ; 'I will defend the island to the bitter end, and, in spite of their strength, I fancy they will find it difficult to force either the Western Pass or the tunnel.'

'If you had the Western Pass as an entrance to Melnos, why did you pierce the tunnel ?' asked Maurice curiously ; 'would it not have been better to have had only one entrance ?'

'Decidedly. But you see the western side of Melnos is exposed to the gales ; and, in spite of the

harbour, its anchorage is hardly safe; so I was forced to build a breakwater on the eastern side of the island. Of course, this being the case, when ships were loaded or unloaded there, the goods could not be taken round to the Western Pass,—hence the tunnel.’

‘I think your scheme is a wonderful one,’ said Maurice with great admiration; ‘and wonderfully carried out.’

‘It is yet only in its infancy, and needs a wise ruler to carry it on to ripe fruition. That ruler, Maurice, I expect to find in you.’

‘I trust you will not be disappointed in my administrative ability.’

‘Well, I am satisfied so far. You have courage, judgment, and self-control, which are the main things needed to govern these excitable Greeks. But let us not go too fast, for I know not yet if you intend to stay in Melnos.’

‘Assuredly I do; especially now I have discovered you are my uncle. Why did you not tell me of our relationship before?’

‘Because I wished you to fall in love with your cousin on your own account. Had I revealed myself, and suggested the marriage, with the natural dislike of

a young man to be forced into matrimony, you might have objected. Oh, my dear nephew, I have had these plans in my head for a long time. Long ago I saw that neither Crispin nor Andros, whom I had trained as my successors, would suit the post. You, Crispin, are a poet, and not a ruler, while as for Andros, whom you know better as Caliphronas, he is but an idle scamp, who would undo all my forty years' work. When I saw my failure in this respect, I married a Greek girl, more from policy than love, in order to beget an heir, but she died when Helena was born, and thus I was disappointed of a son.'

'But you surely do not regret it, uncle, when you have Helena.'

'No; I do not now, as I love my child dearly, but I did then, as I was at my wits' end whom to select as a successor. Then I heard all about you, Maurice, from my agents in England, and resolved to send for you here, and, before revealing myself, ascertain for myself whether you were fit for such a responsible post as ruler of Melnos. The task of bringing you in ignorance here was a delicate one, and I entrusted it to Andros, who promised to fulfil it on the ground that I would permit him to pay his addresses to Helena. I agreed to this, and the result you see;

but there was no question of a forced marriage until lately, when it was rendered necessary to mislead Caliphronas, out of policy. He brought you here, Maurice, and the rest you know, as everything has turned out better than I expected. You are going to marry Helena, and succeed me here,—that is, if you have quite decided to stay.'

'I have decided,' replied Maurice, grasping his uncle's hand warmly. 'I hesitated at first, but now do so no longer. There is nothing to keep me in England, and when Crispin marries Eunice, they can stay at the Grange and look after the estate, while Helena and myself stay here.'

'But your old tutor?'

'If my old tutor comes out, I am sure he will be delighted for me to stay here and forward your plans of a new Hellas. He is an ardent Greek scholar, and will approve thoroughly of my undertaking a good work like the revival of learning, rather than idling away a discontented existence in England.'

'Good!' said Justinian, with great satisfaction; 'all this sets my mind at rest. Never fear about this Alcibiades trouble, Maurice, for Melnos is strong, and I think we can defend her staunchly. When all these storms are at an end, I will devote the remainder of

my days to teaching you all the necessary rules of my policy, so that you can carry it out completely when I die. You, as my heir, Maurice, will inherit this island, and all the invested moneys in London ; so you will find everything smooth before you to carry on the work which I have begun.'

'Well, after all this conversation, I think we had better go to bed,' said Crispin rising with a yawn.

'I am afraid it will be morning soon,' replied Justinian with a smile, as he followed his example, 'so you will not get much sleep ; but I am glad I have told you all my history.'

'It is wonderful !' cried Maurice enthusiastically ; 'and quite gives the lie to the proverb, that "A rolling stone gathers no moss."''

'Stones that rest in inglorious ease gain moss,' said Justinian wisely ; 'but rolling stones which circle the world gather polish. Marco Polo, Columbus, Drake, Napoleon, Cæsar, were all rolling stones, and I think have been of more benefit to the world than those wiseacres who remain gathering moss in the dulness of their homes, in the belief that such vegetating is the true aim of existence.'





## CHAPTER XXX.

### KEEPING VIGIL.

*All day, all night, with anxious eyes,  
I vigil keep,  
To watch the ever-changing skies,  
The changeless deep;  
Yet though for rest the spirit sighs,  
I dare not sleep.*

*For in the skies will comets pale  
Burn warningly,  
When filled with foes black vessels sail  
Across the sea.  
To wake upon our shores the wail  
Of misery.*

*Yet though such ships and stars appear  
As portents vile,  
Our faces will devoid of fear  
With courage smile,  
For Greek and Englishman will here  
Defend the isle.*



TWO weeks passed since the departure of Caliphronas to stir up war against Melnos, Yet Alcibiades made no sign of attacking the island, so doubtless his plans had not yet matured

sufficiently to permit of the assault, or else he was trying to lull the Melnosians into a false security, so as to storm them unaware. Justinian himself thought this last supposition the most likely, but was too old a campaigner to be thus caught napping, and day and night had sentinels posted on the highest peaks of the island to give notice of the approach of the enemy by lighting watch-fires which were all ready prepared.

As before stated, the defenders of Melnos, inclusive of the Englishmen, numbered about a hundred and twenty; certainly a small force to hold the island against three hundred enemies, which, as Caliphronas had told Justinian, was the strength of Alcibiades' army. Melnos, however, strongly fortified by nature, was quite the Gibraltar of the Ægean, and, owing to the ruggedness and height of the surrounding peaks, no enemy could gain the crater of the volcano save by the Western Pass or the tunnel, both of which were skilfully defended by wooden palisades. Maurice himself thought it a mistake that these barriers were not constructed of stone, but Justinian explained that they were thus built so as to admit of the approach of the enemy being seen, when a few determined men entrenched behind could keep at bay a large force in the narrowness of the tunnel or of

the pass, whereas, if a stone wall intervened, an outside foe could perhaps batter it down without hurt from the defenders.

Another advantage which Justinian had over a hostile force was the fact of the tunnel being a staircase, as his men posted on the heights could sweep down the enemy climbing slowly upward. In order to do away the necessity of fighting in the dark, or by the feeble glare of torches, Justinian had a powerful electric search light placed at the inner entrance of the tunnel, so as to command the palisade. Indeed, the Demarch, having unlimited money at his disposal, had the latest European inventions obtainable for the defence of his island, and much regretted that he had been unable to obtain the new magazine rifle which had lately been served out to the English army. This rifle holds six cartridges, which can be fired one after the other, and, unlike the revolver, has but one barrel, as the cartridges lie in a small magazine underneath the cartridge in use for the time being ; but as Justinian was not able to obtain this efficient weapon, he was obliged to put up with the Martini-Henry rifle, which was a deadly enough weapon in the hands of his excellent marksmen.

The Western Pass was a narrow, winding gorge,

created by some primeval convulsion of the volcano, which severed the low semicircle of mountains in a deep cleft ; and at the inner entrance was commanded by two old brass cannon which the Demarch had found in some dismantled tower of the Venetians. These cannon, however, in spite of their age, were in an excellent state of preservation, and could do a deal of damage when sweeping down the narrow pass. The middle of the cleft was fortified by a strong wooden palisade, and at the outer entrance was another of similar construction ; thus the defenders, entrenched behind these barriers, held the invading enemy at considerable disadvantage. Justinian had also another search light sweeping the pass in the event of a night surprise, and thus, the two entrances being so well defended by nature and art, it was feasible enough that the little band could keep at bay even a larger host than that which Alcibiades was bringing against them.

Even if the beleaguerment of the island lasted for months, there was no danger so long as the pass and tunnel were defended, for there was plenty of provision, and all food eaten by the inhabitants was grown on the fertile sides of the crater ; so it was likely that Alcibiades, despairing of taking the place by

storm, would retire his men after a few weeks. The Demarch was perfectly satisfied that he occupied too strong a position to be dislodged, and the only chance of capture lay in inside treachery, or the enemy scaling the peaks and coming down unawares in the rear. Neither of these things were likely to happen, as there was no chance of treachery from the Melnosians, who were all devoted to Justinian; and the enemy, consisting of all the scum of the Levant, had neither the engineering skill nor the courage to climb over the forbidding-looking mountains which enclosed the central crater of the volcano.

During the two weeks the watchmen on the heights kept a constant watch for the foe, and Justinian, assisted by Maurice and Dick, looked after the military preparations with right good will. The rifles were duly served out to the men, who practised shooting daily, also swords and cutlasses, in the use of which Dick instructed them; yet all this time they went on with their work, and only after it was over did they attend to their military duties. There was no fear of the ammunition giving out, as the Demarch had constructed a magazine in a lonely part of the valley, which was filled with cartridges, cannon balls, and plenty of powder.

All this elaborate military preparation to defend a rocky little island may sound childish enough in Western ears accustomed to the gigantic military powers of Europe ; but the coming assault on Melnos was no holiday battle, but would probably involve a good deal of hard fighting, as the desperadoes of Alcibiades were by no means to be despised. They thought that Melnos was full of treasure, quite unaware of Justinian's wise precaution of sending the public revenue of Melnos to London to be in safety ; and, lusting for gold, they were ready to fight like demons, in order to plunder the island. The defenders, on their side, valued their homes, wives, and children too much to permit a loose band of absolute wretches to gain entrance into their stronghold ; so it seemed as though the fight on both sides would be fought with dogged determination to the bitter end.

Maurice and Dick were the principal assistants of Justinian at this juncture, as Crispin knew nothing about military matters, and the testy old Demarch said he was more trouble than use ; so he wandered about a good deal with Helena, quite the idler of the community. In spite of this, however, all knew that Crispin was as keen as any one on fighting, and would defend the island with the best of them ;

besides which, being the minstrel of the party, he wrote war-songs after the mode of Tyrtæus, to fire the Melnosians with martial enthusiasm.

The old fighting blood of the Roylands showed itself plainly in the Demarch and his nephew, for they both looked anxiously forward to the anticipated invasion, and would have been seriously annoyed had it not come off. Justinian himself quite renewed his youth at the idea of once more smelling powder, and his fiery energy, overriding all obstacles, occupying itself ceaselessly with all military matters, at times even tired out his muscular nephew. Yet Maurice worked bravely, and showed himself to be made of the stuff required for leaders of men, and, despite his ignorance of matters military, made several valuable suggestions from a common-sense point of view, which were greatly approved of by the Demarch.

‘Egad, Maurice!’ he said, grimly surveying his nephew, ‘if I had only had you instead of Caliphronas, I would have made a man of you.’

‘Meaning I’m not a man now,’ said Maurice, rather nettled.

‘By no means. You’ve got the Roylands spirit, my boy, and will fight like the devil himself when needs be ; but when I think of all those years of idle-

ness in England, it makes me angry. Such a loss of good material which could be made use of, and I dare say there are hundreds of fellows of your physique and stamina, who write their lives away in offices instead of going in for an adventurous career and dying rich. What I mean is that you are made of the same stuff as I, and had I possessed you as my right hand when I started this scheme, egad, I'd have had a kingdom instead of an island !'

'You forget, I was not born forty years ago.'

'No more you were—more's the pity ! Those were glorious times, and, in spite of my years, I do not regret having been born early in the century. Life is too tame now, all bread and butter and explosive machines. Give me the good old days of hand to hand combat, lots of adventure, rows galore, and the devil take the hindmost.'

'I never met such a man as you, uncle.'

'Then you never met yourself. I don't mean your *doppel-gänger*, but your inner self, for you are exactly what I was, though how the deuce your father ever came to have such a son, I do not know. He was as mild as milk, my brother Austin.'

'Was he ?' said Maurice grimly, thinking of the many family rows that had taken place.



‘Oh, I don’t deny he had a spice of the Roylands temper, but as to ambition and enterprise, he might as well have been born a carrot. Why, he nearly ruined you, my boy, with neglecting to put you on the right track—no wonder you got melancholia and all that rubbish. You are a worker, not a dreamer.’

‘I have brains, I suppose?’

‘Yes, and so has Crispin ; but he uses his brains in the right way, you don’t. Crispin is born to sit down and tinkle a lute, you are born to handle a sword and lead an exciting career. Why didn’t you go into the army?’

‘My father wouldn’t let me.’

‘Of course!’ said Justinian with a snort of disdain ; ‘he wanted to make you a mollycoddle like himself. I wonder you did not go out of your mind in that smoky London, chipping away at marble and cutting it out. Why, you have only been here a couple of months, and already you are in your right mind. Go back to England indeed!—you are a fool if you do. Like myself, you are born to be a ruler, not a unit in English civilisation. I’m glad I got you to myself before it was too late.’

‘Well, if my career has begun late, I am at least young, and have a long life before me.’

‘Yes; I envy you that, Maurice. Look at me! youthful in spirit, old in years. I shall die in the prime of my spiritual strength, just because my wretched body is of an inferior quality to my soul.’

‘Still you are good for a few years yet. And, uncle, don’t you think it would be wise of you not to expose yourself in battle?’

‘What!’ roared the old Demarch in a voice of thunder; ‘stay in the background! Never while I can handle a sword. I’m not going to let every one else have the fun, and leave myself out of it. Why, this coming war in a teacup is the first bit of amusement I have had for years, and yet you grudge it to me.’

‘I don’t want you to be killed, uncle.’

‘Oh, I’ll look after myself, never you be afraid! I won’t live any the longer for wrapping myself up in cotton wool, and if I die, why, like Tennyson’s farmer, I die, but I’ll have one stirring fight before I give up the ghost.’

‘You have the Baresark fury in you, uncle.’

‘An inheritance from our Norman ancestors, my boy. You are more of courtly old Sir Guyon, who went to the Crusades, but I resemble Jarl Hagon, who came sailing to Normandy with Rollo. Indeed, if the theory of transmigration be true, I believe the

spirit of that old Norse savage is incarnate in my body. I am born too late! I am an anachronism in this dull, peaceful century, all gas and steam engines. I ought to have fought with Drake and Frobisher. However, I have done my best to make my surroundings agree with my nature, and the result is—Melnos.’

‘Which is the result, not of war, but of peace!’

‘Eh!—oh, I daresay—it is a toy with which I can amuse myself; but you forget that before I colonised Melnos, I had battled all over the world, and thus expended a good deal of my Baresark fit.’

‘And now it comes again!’

‘The last upleaping of the flame, my boy,’ said Justinian sadly; ‘and then death. But there, I talk so much about myself, that you must think me egotistical. What about that electric light I wish to try?’

‘Alexandros and Gurt are fitting it up on the platform.’

‘Good! but say Gurt and Alexandros in future. An Englishman goes before every one else.’

‘How patriotic you are, uncle! Yet you have forsaken England.’

‘England was an unjust stepmother to me, but absence makes the heart grow fonder, and, in spite of

my residence here, I have as patriotic a spirit as any of your Jingoists, who shout War! war! war! on the least provocation. Come, let us go and look at this search light on the terrace.'

Justinian, during the last few years, had dabbled considerably in electric matters, and had sent Alexandros to England in order to learn all about the science. Alexandros, keen-witted in all things, had soon picked up all that was requisite, and was quite an accomplished electrician; so when he returned to Melnos, he brought with him, by Justinian's instructions, all machines necessary for the production of the light. The powerful engine for working the dynamo was placed at the back of the Acropolis, under the eye of the Demarch himself, and from this centre the wires were laid to the tunnel and the Western Pass. Thus the machine being, so to speak, in the heart of the island, was safe from being captured by enemies, and the lighting of both places was quite under the control of Alexandros. The Demarch had also a third apparatus rigged up on the terrace, in order to make a trial of the power of the light, which was to be tried that night; for Justinian wished everything to be in thorough working order against the arrival of Alcibiades and his army.

While they were examining the electric apparatus on the terrace in front of the Acropolis, Helena, in company with Dick and Zoe, came to them in a great state of excitement.

‘Papa, give me the key of the tunnel, for Crispin says the boat has arrived from Syra with letters!’

‘By Jove, that’s good news!’ cried Maurice, as the Demarch handed the key to his daughter. ‘Now we will know all about the new yacht, uncle, and if Melnos is taken, we can go to Syra, and escape on board of her.’

‘Melnos won’t be taken,’ said Justinian with a frown. ‘I am quite astonished at your suggesting such a thing, Maurice. Besides, the yacht is going to Athens.’

‘Yes, but Crispin sent a letter to the telegraph office there, telling them to wire to the agents that the yacht was to stop at Syra.’

‘Humph! well, that is not bad news. As you say, it is as well to be prepared for emergencies. Here is the key, Helena. Where is Crispin?’

‘Waiting at the tunnel entrance!’ replied Helena brightly, and went away with the key of the island, guarded by Dick and Zoe.

There was every sign that these two were following

in the footsteps of their master and mistress, for as Zoe, tutored by Helena, could speak English very well, there was no obstacle to Dick's wooing. The bos'n was a handsome young fellow, with a masterful manner about him, which the Greek maiden found very pleasant, so she was not at all indisposed to yield to his solicitations, and become Mrs. Dick, the more so, as she thought this marriage would not part her from Helena, whom she loved dearly. Her early flame, Gurt, had quite vacated the field in favour of his handsome young rival, and now took a paternal interest in the match. As yet, Zoe, with innate coquetry, had not given Dick a direct answer, but there was little doubt, in the end, she would accept this assiduous lover, who worshipped her very shadow.

While the three had departed to take Crispin the key of the gate, Justinian continued examining the electric apparatus, and questioning Alexandros concerning the mode of working.

'The moon is not up till late to-night,' said the Demarch, looking at the sky, 'so in the darkness we will be able to test it splendidly. Are the lights at the tunnel and the Western Pass in order, Alexandros?' he added in Greek.

‘Yes, Kyrios. I attended to them to-day, myself.’

‘And the engine?’

‘Works perfectly, Kyrios.’

‘Capital!’ said Justinian in English, turning to Maurice. ‘I think our electric powers will rather startle Alcibiades!’

‘No doubt; but do you know, uncle, I think it is a pity you did not place a search light on one of those peaks, so as to sweep the ocean, and thus reveal their approach if they try to steal in to the beach under the cover of darkness.’

‘True, true!’ said the Demarch thoughtfully, nursing his chin, ‘we will think of that, but meanwhile try this light to-night. Besides the watchmen on the peaks, Maurice, you know there are also two on the beach, one on each side of the island, so if they see Alcibiades’ approach first, they will light their fires to signal to the peaks, and those above will fire theirs to warn us. It is easier to see from the beach than from above, where everything looks flat. Besides, the nights are so still, that the sound of oars can easily be heard a long way off, especially by men trained to hear like my Greeks.’

‘But suppose Alcibiades uses no oars?’

‘Oh, well, in any case we will be warned in time.’

But in case of a night attack, the men can muster rapidly, I suppose?’

‘In a few minutes.’

‘And the guard?’

‘There is a strong one in the tunnel, under the command of Gurt, and another in the pass, commanded by Temistocles.’

‘Good! With such precautions we cannot very well be surprised. But here is Crispin.’

‘In a state of great excitement, too,’ said Maurice laughing. ‘He has got a satisfactory answer to his letter.’

‘It’s all right!’ called out Crispin, mounting the steps, waving an open letter in his hand; ‘the yacht has left England for Syra, with Mrs. Dengelton, the Rector, and Eunice!’

‘Is there a letter for me?’ asked Maurice, nodding his satisfaction at this intelligence.

‘Yes, one from the Rector. See if it encloses one from Eunice to me.’

Maurice tore open the letter of his old tutor, and out dropped an envelope, directed to ‘Crispin,’ in dainty feminine handwriting, of which the poet at once took greedy possession. On the balustrade of the terrace, Maurice sat down to read his letter, and



Crispin, after glancing at Eunice's private note, rattled on to Justinian about the contents of his own correspondence, which he had read on the way hither from the tunnel.

'The agents got my letter all right, sir,' he said gaily, 'and had no difficulty in securing the yacht I wanted, which was still in the market. She left England a week ago.'

'For Athens?'

'Why, no. As there was danger of a row, I thought it best she should be near at hand, so wired to the agents that she was to stop at Syra, where she ought to arrive shortly.'

'She left Southampton after your letters, I presume?'

'Yes, a day or so after. Of course the letters came overland to Brindisi, which gained them five days, or thereabouts, and then caught the boat to Syra, and came straight on here with Georgios. *The Eunice!*'

'Oh, is that the name of the yacht?' cried Helena roguishly.

'Yes; the old *Eunice* is under water, but I call the new boat by the old name.'

'So *The Eunice* is carrying her namesake?'

‘Exactly. Well, *The Eunice* will run down to Syra in about twelve days ; a week has already gone by, so we may expect her there in a few days.’

‘When she arrives, what do you propose to do?’

‘With your permission, go over to Syra and bring her here.’

‘By all means, if we are not blockaded in the meantime ; but if we are, you will have to stay here.’

‘And *The Eunice* at Syra!’ rejoined Crispin in a vexed tone. ‘Well, perhaps it will be for the best, as your sister, niece, and Mr. Carriston are on board, and won’t care about being mixed up in a battle.’

‘My sister!’ repeated Justinian thoughtfully ; ‘she was born just when I left England, and I only caught a glimpse of her when I went back, so she is quite a stranger to me. Is she a—a pleasant sort of person?’

‘Well, she talks a good deal,’ said Crispin with some hesitation.

‘Then I am afraid she will tire me dreadfully,’ said the Demarch drily, ‘for I do not like chatterboxes. However, Helena will be glad to see her aunt. Will you not, child?’

‘Of course, papa. I will be glad to see all my relations if they are as charming as Cousin Maurice.’

‘Eunice is an angel.’

‘Of course,’ said Helena mockingly; ‘that is because you love her. Why, Maurice says the same thing about me.’

‘What does Maurice say?’ asked that gentleman, looking up from his letter.

‘That I am the dearest girl in the world,’ laughed Helena, going up to him.

‘I shall find that out when your milliner’s bills come in.’

‘Milliner!’ said the child of Nature; ‘what is a milliner?’

They all laughed at this, particularly Justinian, who pinched his daughter’s ear gently.

‘Ah, a milliner is a very important person, my child. She makes gowns.’

‘Like this white one of mine?’

‘No, more’s the pity,’ said Crispin with a laughing glance at the simple white garment; ‘if all gowns were of that style, the bills would not be so large, and husbands would frown less. Well, Maurice, and what says the Rector?’

‘He declines to commit himself to an opinion until

he sees Melnos with his own eyes,' said Maurice, putting the letter in his pocket, 'and is coming out especially to see the new Hellas. There, uncle, is that not a compliment?'

'I shall be glad to see Mr. Carriston,' observed Justinian a little stiffly, as Maurice thought. 'Crispin, did Georgios see anything of Alcibiades?'

'No, nothing.'

'Or hear anything?'

'Not a word.'

'They must be keeping all their preparations very quiet,' muttered the Demarch to himself as he went inside; 'but, for all that, I believe an attack will take place within the week.'

The party on the terrace broke up after his withdrawal, leaving Alexandros still busy at his electric apparatus, which was in complete order by night-time. After a merry supper, every one came out again on to the terrace to make experiments with the light, and Alexandros went away to look after his dynamo.

Such a still night as it was, with not a breath of air to cool the hot atmosphere, and the sky in the shimmering heat seemed closer to the earth than usual. No moon was yet in the heavens, but the

dark blue vault was bright with innumerable stars, large and mellow, like tropical constellations. The valley below was in complete shadow, not the glimmer of a white-walled house being visible, and the sides of the gigantic cup which formed the crater of the volcano were veiled in diaphanous darkness. So intensely quiet was everything, that even the nightingales were silent, and there seemed something awesome in this breathless stillness of Nature, as though the whole earth were dead, and only the handful of people assembled there alive.

‘I don’t like this sultry night,’ whispered Helena to Maurice uneasily, as he stood by one of the pillars with his arm round her waist. ‘I hope nothing is wrong with the volcano!’

‘What! after thousands of years’ quiet?’ laughed Maurice gently. ‘My dear child, the volcano is as extinct as the dodo.’

‘I don’t know what a dodo is,’ replied Helena panting; ‘but the whole place seems so unnaturally still that it gives me the idea of some coming trouble.’

‘Perhaps Alcibiades!’

Oh, we can fight against him, but we can’t fight against an eruption.’

‘Who is talking about an eruption?’ said Justinian,

turning round from the electric apparatus he was examining.

‘ Helena. She is afraid there will be one soon.’

‘ Nonsense, nonsense!’ said the old man testily, yet with an anxious frown on his face. ‘ If there was danger of an upheaval, we would be warned by the hot springs, but they are just bubbling as usual. Besides, Georgios tells me there is an eruption at Santorin, so with that vent for the volcanic forces we are quite safe. Why, I have lived here for forty years in safety, and the crater has been extinct for thousands of years, so we need not be afraid of anything going wrong now.’

Thus pacified, Helena, in common with the rest, turned her attention to the electric light, which at this moment flashed out from the carbon points in terrible splendour. Alexandros began to move it about, and like the flaming sword of St. Michael, or the tail of a comet, it swept in a tremendous arc across the dark sky. Turned down on the valley, it revealed everything as if it were day, the lake, the houses, the trees, the streets—all sprang out of the darkness with the minuteness of a photograph. Then the intolerable brilliance began to move slowly round the sides of the crater, the black pine forests, the arid

rocks, and then the rugged peaks, white with chill snows. But, lo! as it travelled eastward along the jagged heights, on one burned a huge red star.

‘The watchfire!’ cried Maurice, springing to his feet.

‘Turn off the light!’ commanded Justinian hastily.

Alexandros did so, and there on the cold peak, amid the luminous twilight, flamed the bonfire of the watch like a baneful star, telling of destruction, war, and death.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE BATTLE OF TROGLODYTES.

*I hear the noise of battle tumultuous !*

*It is not on the earth, nor do spectral hosts contend in the cloudy sky ;  
Under my feet it is raging, in the heart of the globe skirmish the  
struggling armies.*

*The cries of horror, the clash of weapons, the sharp crack of the  
deadly rifle,*

*Strike dully on my ear, as though the crust of the earth intervened  
between them fighting, and I listening.*

*Yes, the battle is subterranean ! Do the gnomes assault one another  
Over some new vein of gold but lately discovered ?*

*Or do the dead, not rising from stone-sealed sepulchres,*

*Renew those quarrels below, which on earth ended their existence ?*

*I know not indeed whether it be the dead or the gnomes,*

*But I hear the noise of battle tumultuous !*



HERE was no doubt that a night attack was intended, and that Alcibiades, hoping to take Justinian by surprise, trusted he would be able to break in through the tunnel before his secret arrival was discovered. Unfortunately for himself, he did not know the military alertness of the



Demarch, who, warned by the watchfires, marshalled his soldiers with the greatest rapidity, and in the space of half an hour every man on the island was drawn up, under arms, in the space before the Acropolis. The powerful electric light flooded the whole crater, so that the little army manœuvred as though it were day, and in profound silence every man took his place in the ranks, ready to march to the front.

Justinian held a hurried council of war with Maurice, Crispin, and Dick, as to the disposal of the troops, for the question was whether Alcibiades would concentrate his forces in the tunnel, and make one bold dash for the island, or, dividing his men into two bodies, attack both entrances simultaneously. Messengers had now arrived from the watchmen on the heights and on the beach, from whose report it appeared that the advancing enemy were all making in a body for the eastern side of the island, therefore the Demarch came to the conclusion that, for the present, only the tunnel was threatened by the invader. However, to obviate any chance of the Western Pass being taken by surprise, about thirty men, under the command of Crispin and Dick, marched in that direction, and the remaining eighty-six, with Justinian and his nephew as leaders, took

up their station inside the tunnel palisade. Alexandros, of course, remained behind at the Acropolis to attend to the working of the electric lights, which were burning with full power at the Western Pass and in the tunnel, the middle apparatus being turned off after the departure of the men, so as to increase the brilliance of the other two. Temistocles was employed as a messenger between the two forces, so as to keep the four leaders thoroughly cognisant of what occurred either on the western or eastern side of the island.

The watchmen on the beach had waited until the boats of Alcibiades were near shore, then rapidly fled up the tunnel to the palisade, through the door of which they were admitted by Justinian, who listened to their excited report concerning the number of the enemy with the greatest calmness. Indeed, the Roylands capability for command showed itself in both the Demarch and his nephew, for the more perilous did the situation become, the cooler they were, and never for a moment lost their heads in giving orders to their men. This self-control had a wonderful effect on the nerve of the Melnosians, who, thoroughly efficient as regards drill, and absolutely blind in their implicit obedience to their leaders,

carried out all commands with the utmost skill and promptitude.

At the entrance of the tunnel burned the great round of the electric light, like a full moon, illuminating the neighbourhood of the palisade with steady splendour, so that the defensive operations could be carried out to the minutest detail without the slightest difficulty. Earthen works had been built half-way up the wooden structure to the height of a man's shoulders, and now on top of this the Melnosians laid bags of sand diagonally, the one overlapping the other, to either side of the tunnel, with interstices between them at intervals for the barrels of the rifles. All this was arranged so as to afford those inside a good view of the attack, while protecting them in a great measure from the fire of the stormers. The electric light also gained them a considerable advantage, as, being at their backs, they could carry on their operations with ease, while it dazzled the eyes of the enemy, who in front of them would but see the black mass of the palisade, and at intervals catch a glimpse of the defenders like silhouettes against the bright glare, which would have a detrimental effect on the fire of the attacking party.

Both Maurice and the Demarch were armed with

revolvers and sabres, while the sailors had their cutlasses, and the Melnosians their Martini-Henry rifles ; thus, what with these and the protecting palisade, everything was in their favour, especially as the steepness of the ascent hampered the enemy considerably in their dash to carry the barrier by storm. Thus entrenched, they waited in absolute silence, with calm courage, for the onslaught, and shortly heard the tramp of approaching feet, the ring of guns and swords, and the exclamations of astonishment uttered by the invaders, when the powerful rays of the electric light flashed on their advancing mass.

Alcibiades might be a good commander, but he was a confoundedly bad drill-sergeant, for his men came up the staircase in a singularly disorderly fashion, rushing forward pell-mell, as though they anticipated an easy victory. However, at the sight of the electric light, and the barricade, from which protruded the deadly barrels of the rifles, their impetus received a decided check, and the foremost, recoiling on those in the rear, threw the whole body into confusion. Hesitating thus for a second in bewilderment, they offered a fair mark to the defenders, who, at a given signal by Justinian, poured a heavy fire into the huddled mass of human beings. Some fell

dead, many wounded, and the yells of the discomfited assailants vibrated under the vaulted roof of the tunnel, as they retired in disorder.

Then the stentorian voice of Alcibiades was heard urging them forward, and with sudden resolution they dashed forward like a wave on a rock, only to again retire before the deadly volley of the Melnosians. The ground was cumbered with the dead and dying, while the air was so thick with gunpowder smoke that it hung like a veil between the contending parties, and not even the powerful rays of the electric light could break through the opaque cloud. As yet, protected by their earthworks, the Melnosians had not lost one man, for the bullets of the enemy passed harmlessly over their heads or buried themselves in the sand and turf. Justinian ordered his men to reserve their fire, as the attacking party were now retreating for the third time in confusion, and therefore, being considerably scattered, did not offer so good a mark as when they rushed forward in a dense mass.

Evidently they were holding a consultation, for when they again assaulted the barricade, one party dashed forward under a heavy fire, with hatchets to cut away the timbers, while the others remained behind and kept up a fusilade at a safe distance.

In order to avert this danger, and save the palisade from being cut down, the marksmen returned the fire of the rear rank, while, using the bayonets at close quarters, their comrades stabbed the stormers whenever they could get a chance. Notwithstanding this warm reception, the assaulting party still stuck to their work, and amid the infernal din of yells from wounded and fighters, could be heard the steady blows of the hatchets, the sharp crack of the guns, and the ping, ping, ping of the bullets whizzing through the smoky air. At last, in spite of their valour, the stormers were forced to retire, but not without doing considerable damage, for they had cut through a considerable number of the barrier posts, so that the palisade was now in a somewhat shaky condition.

‘Egad! they’ll have this down in no time, Maurice,’ said Justinian to his nephew, with a grim smile, ‘and then it will be hand-to-hand fighting.’

‘All the better!’ replied Maurice, coolly examining the edge of his sword. ‘I fancy they will find it hard to drive us back from this position. Here they come again. The devil!’

‘What’s the matter?’

‘They are going to fire the barricade! that is Caliphronas’ idea, I’ll bet!’

A party of men now surged forward, bearing huge bundles of brushwood, smeared with tar and inflammable oils, which they threw at the foot of the barrier, and ignited without a moment's delay. The Melnosians, adopting their former tactics, shot and stabbed with right good will, but the advantage was with the enemy, for, in the space of a few minutes, the wooden poles and crossbars of the barricade were in flames. Against this new peril nothing could be done, as, not anticipating this stratagem, Justinian had not provided himself with water ; so the flames, leaping redly out of the thick smoke, roared upward to the roof of the tunnel, while the little band, some with bayonets fixed, others with guns loaded, awaited the assault which would follow the downfall of the protective palisade.

As if to hasten this catastrophe, the enemy, with infinite labour, dragged a small cannon up the steep stairs, and, having placed it in position, fired recklessly into the centre of the blazing mass, with the hope of the ball cutting a lane through the Melnosians. Luckily, owing to the irregularity of the ground, they were unable to depress the muzzle of the gun sufficiently, and the shot passed innocuously overhead, having no other effect than to bring down a

small shower of stones from the roof of the tunnel. Justinian was rather dismayed when he found they had succeeded in bringing up a gun, but when he saw the effect of the shot, he smiled contemptuously.

‘That’s no good,’ he said confidently ; ‘they can’t get the muzzle low enough to be effective.’

‘Nevertheless, if the roof’—

The end of his sentence was lost in a tremendous explosion, which nearly stunned them all, for, in their eagerness to fire, Alcibiades’ men had overloaded their cannon, with the result that it burst at the application of the light, and killed five men.

‘Glory! glory!’ yelled Gurt, when he heard the row ; ‘they can’t do much now, d—n them!’

‘No!’ cried Maurice rapidly ; ‘the barricade will soon be down, and it will be a hand-to-hand fight. If they bring up another gun, we’ll take it by storm.’

The heat by this time was something intense, owing to the propinquity of the fierce flames, while the thick white smoke, rolling upward in clouds, nearly choked them with its pungent odour. The Melnosians were getting the worst of it in this case, as the draught blowing upward from the sea drove the eddying wreaths of acrid vapour full against their faces, while the enemy was quite free from such an-



noyance. Headed by Alcibiades and Caliphronas, who, for a wonder, had pluck enough to place himself in front of his men, they awaited with impatience the fall of the barricade, and, quite anticipating that the Melnosians would be choked by the pungent smoke, were prepared to dash forward and carry the earthworks by storm, while the defenders were yet stupefied. Justinian saw this danger, made up his mind, and acted thereon with promptitude and decision.

‘Maurice, we must make a sally, and get into the clear air beyond, else this smoke will suffocate us, and thus give them the advantage.’

‘Right!’ replied his nephew, recognising the necessity for immediate action. ‘The flames are now pretty low, so let us dash through at once and take them by surprise. I will lead. You stay here, sir.’

‘I’m hanged if I will!’

‘You must, uncle, so as to help me if I need it. Tell the men to follow me, as I am not well up in Greek.’

At this moment, the barricade fell down with a crash, amid a sudden shower of sparks and rolling vapours. They could hear the triumphant shouts of Alcibiades at the achievement of this result, and

Maurice ground his teeth with anger, as he caught the taunting tones of Caliphronas' voice, rejoicing over this catastrophe.

'You wait here with some men, uncle, and build up the earthwork higher, while I make a dash with a handful, and see if I cannot drive them down the staircase.'

This suggestion was more palatable to Justinian than the former one, as it gave him something to do, so he hastily told the men of Maurice's suggestion. A number of the Melnosians, who were lying on the ground with their heads wrapped in their cloaks to escape the stifling smoke, sprang up, on hearing this, with a joyous shout ; so, hastily selecting his men, Maurice unsheathed his sword, grasped his revolver, and made ready for a dash. Owing to the fall of the palisade, the flames were now very low, but the smoke still rolled upward in blinding clouds, thus effectively concealing their movements from the enemy.

'Good-bye, my lad ! God bless you !' said the old lion, grasping his nephew's hand. 'Drive them down as far as you can, and, while you keep them at bay, I will have the barricade built up again, with sand-bags and turf.'

Followed by Gurt and about twenty men, Maurice leaped up on the earthwork, and dashed downward through the smouldering ruins of the beams with a fierce cry. In a moment they were out of the smoke and into the clear atmosphere, while the enemy, thrown into confusion by their unexpected sally, recoiled in confusion. Alcibiades, however, seeing the smallness of the party, soon rallied them with curses and prayers, so the next instant Maurice and his men were in the thick of the fight.

It was now a hand-to-hand struggle, maintained with equal fierceness on either side, but, fortunately, the narrowness of the tunnel prevented the small band of the Melnosians being overwhelmed by their enemies, while the fact that they were on the higher ground gave them a decided advantage, which made up somewhat for lack of numbers. The electric light again pierced the now thin veil of smoke, so that they could see what they were doing, and the Melnosians used their cutlasses with deadly effect, while those who had bayonets fixed to their guns stabbed the enemy relentlessly, as they dashed forward again and again. Gurt kept close beside Maurice, fighting like the old sea-dog he was, and got a nasty stab in the thigh, which brought him to the ground. Alcibiades

saw this, and sprang forward to finish the unfortunate sailor, when Maurice, having cut down a wiry Greek, who was pressing him closely, turned just in time to see Alcibiades lift his sword for the blow. As quick as possible, he raised his revolver to firing level, and the bullet hitting the captain's arm near the elbow, caused him to drop his weapon with a yell of pain, though the shot but inflicted a flesh wound.

Hitherto the fighting had been all in one place, as neither party would give way an inch; but now, disturbed by the reverse of their leader, the enemy began to fall slowly back. Caliphronas indeed tried to rally them, but, on seeing this, Maurice sprang forward to encounter him, clearing a space for the fight by whirling his sabre rapidly round his head; but the Greek, seized with sudden panic, flung himself into the centre of his men, so that Roylands' efforts to reach him were futile.

Maurice's band was now much diminished, and he had serious thoughts of retreating back to the barricade, which Justinian by this time must have almost rebuilt, but seeing that the advantage was now on his side, he was unwilling to lose it; so, with his men stretched out into a single line from side to side, he continued to advance, driving the

enemy step by step down the staircase. Alcibiades, who was a brave man in spite of his villainy, had now shifted his sword to his left hand, as his right arm hung almost useless at his side, and with many prayers, curses, entreaties, and taunts, strove to rally his forces, but all to no purpose, for slowly but surely they retreated before that devoted little band, who, with flashing eyes and clenched teeth, pressed them steadily downward. Gurt, having bound up his thigh with a piece torn from his shirt, was again by Maurice's side, fighting with a dogged determination, in spite of all entreaties to retreat back to the barricade.

‘Go back, Gurt! go back and tell Justinian to send more men.’

‘What! and leave you with these devils? Not if I know it, sir. Hurrah! England for ever!’

‘But you are wounded.’

‘Only a prod in the thigh. Look out, sir, for that black wretch!’

Maurice sprang aside, just in time to avoid a slashing-down blow, and, turning on his foe, made a dash at him with his sabre. He managed to run him through the left shoulder, but the Greek like lightning cut at his defenceless head, and, but for

Gurt, who intervened with his cutlass, Maurice's career would have been ended. As it was, the Greek's weapon smashed against the sailor's sword, and before he could recover himself for another blow, Maurice had slashed him through the neck, so that he fell dead at once.

The enemy were fighting like demons, and, the electric light having been shut off by the angle of the tunnel, the battle was raging in complete darkness, save for the fitful glare of the torches held by Alcibiades' men, and the pale glimmer of daylight forcing itself in at the cliff entrance of the tunnel. As long as Maurice could keep his enemies in front, and his line steadily advancing, he had no fear, while, owing to the confusion of the retreat, the foe kept fighting the one with the other in the semi-darkness. Step by step they fell backward, until nearly the lowest platform of the staircase, when Maurice, having thus accomplished his object, began to think of turning back, especially as he had now but ten men left.

At the entrance of the tunnel, however, he saw the cowardly Caliphronas in the rear, keeping out of harm's way, and, forgetting his caution of keeping the enemy in front, sprang forward to battle with

the Greek. Alcibiades saw the false move, and, when Maurice's men followed him rashly forward, dashed back with a handful of his troops, and in a moment the little band was surrounded with a horde of howling savages. This was immediately under the entrance of the tunnel, on level ground, so, the advantage being with the enemy in every way, it seemed as though the Englishman and his handful would be cut to pieces. Seeing his mistake, Maurice, with his devoted followers, strove to fight his way back up the stair, but, environed on all sides by a tumultuous crowd, gave himself up for lost.

‘My God! if Justinian would only come!’ he prayed, as he fought back to back with Gurt and surrounded by his band. ‘Will nothing save us!’

At that moment, as if in answer to his prayer, a low moaning sound came sweeping over the ocean, making every heart sink with fear. The island began to tremble, and for the moment so terrible was the suspense, that the fighting ceased. Friend and foe stood alike pallid with fear, as the ground began to shake convulsively, and the whole host looked as though turned into stone. The ground, heaving convulsively, hurled every one to the ground, including Maurice and his band, who were just

beyond the entrance of the tunnel. Suddenly there was a sound like thunder, and on the prostrate mass of humanity lying on the quivering earth, a great mass of rock fell from above. What with the dust, the noise, the yells of fear, and the imprecations, Maurice was almost stunned, and when he arose to his feet, he saw that the enormous slip caused by the earthquake had not only killed a number of the enemy, but had also blocked up the entrance to the tunnel.

Seeing that there was no hope of return that way, and well aware that Alcibiades and those of his men who still survived would kill him as soon as they recovered from their fright, Maurice sprang to his feet and seized Gurt by the arm.

‘To the boats! the boats!’ he gasped, hurrying the astonished sailor down to the water’s edge. ‘Tunnel closed. We must try the Western Pass.’

About four Melnosians had followed him, and these, with superhuman strength, pushed off a boat from shore. When all six were afloat, the islanders took the oars and commenced to pull outward, so as to skirt the breakwater. By this time the enemy had recovered from their first terror, and, seeing the escape of the fugitives, came rushing



down to the sea. There seemed to be nearly two hundred of them left, and being pretty well used to such trifles as earthquakes, especially those who came from Santorin, now that the danger was past, they were determined to follow and kill the little band.

Luckily, Maurice, by his prompt action, had gained a good start, and was already outside the breakwater, making for the western side of the island, where he hoped to re-enter through the Western Pass. He could see Alcibiades and Caliphronas gesticulating fiercely on the beach and urging their companions to follow, so, just as the fugitives came in sight of the wreck of *The Eunice*, their enemies started in pursuit.

‘Thank God for that earthquake!’ said Maurice thankfully, taking off his cap. ‘It saved our lives.’

‘Don’t holler till you’re out of the wood, sir,’ said Gurt drily, pointing to the sea. ‘I’ve see’d that sort o’ thing at Thera, and it ain’t no child’s play.’

The waters around them were boiling like a furnace, and had changed from their normal blue tint to the colour of milk. Maurice, in astonishment, dipped his hand over the side of the boat into this opalescent sea, but withdrew it immediately with a cry of pain.

The water was boiling hot!

‘Bless you, sir, there’s lots of that sort of thing

about here,' said Gurt in a philosophical tone. 'I've see'd it a-bilin' round Santorin like a kittle. These Greeks don't mind it much.'

'Don't they!' replied Maurice in a disbelieving tone. 'Well, Alcibiades and his lot seemed pretty sick.'

'While it lasts they're frightened enough, but they soon get over it, sir. Look at 'em follering!'

By this time they were rounding the angle of Melnos, and the breakwater of the western harbour was in sight; but the boat containing Alcibiades, manned by able rowers, was gradually gaining on them. Two of the Melnosians, though they tugged away pluckily, were yet in great pain from wounds, while Gurt, feeble from loss of blood, could hardly rise to his feet.

'Give way, men!' cried Maurice in Greek, as he examined his revolver. 'I've got two shots left, Gurt, so, if that boat comes too near, I'll try and pick off one of the rowers.'

'We're not far from home now, sir,' said Gurt hopefully; 'and Mr. Crispin will be at the gate.'

'I hope he will, Gurt; but this earthquake must have demoralised everything, and perhaps Mr. Crispin went back to see Justinian.'

‘Not he, sir ; he’d send Temistocles. But Mr. Justinian must think us dead.’

‘It’s not improbable. However, we will soon show him we’re alive, though the tunnel is closed up for ever.’

‘Good job too, sir,’ replied Gurt cheerfully ; ‘there’s no getting in that way now ; so, if these villains want to take Melnos, they’ll only have the Western Pass to enter by. I guess that there rock, sir, killed a few.’

‘What with the battle and the earthquake, they must have lost at least a hundred men, while our number of deaths must be comparatively small.’

‘We’ve got nigh on a hundred left, I think, sir ; but, if it weren’t fur you, sir, gittin’ that idear of the boat, we’d be all dead men, for sure.’

‘Egad, we’ll be dead men now, if we don’t look out!’ said Maurice, as the foremost boat of their pursuers came within pistol-shot. ‘Look out, Gurt ; I’m going to pick off that fellow standing up in the prow.’

The Melnosians, in their sudden rush for the boat, had naturally enough dropped their guns ; but Maurice, with an Englishman’s determination to stick to anything he has once got a grip of, had carried off his sword, and still possessed his revolver. Gurt also had his cutlass, so, in the event of their foes catching

them on land before they could gain the shelter of the stockade, Maurice and one of the Melnosians would have to defend the three wounded men and the remaining one, who had no weapon. Meanwhile, their boat, impelled by the rowers with the energy of despair, had rounded the breakwater, and was rapidly sweeping inward to the land. Some little distance above they could see the narrow entrance of the pass, but, as Crispin and his men were entrenched behind the palisade, further up the gorge, of course the fugitives could not hope for their help. Maurice, however, thought that the pistol-shots might attract attention, as the sound carries far in that rarefied atmosphere, and he also told his Melnosians to shout loudly, so as to let their friends know they were in peril.

Just as the boat was nearly touching the land, a bullet from the rifle of the man standing up in the prow whizzed past Maurice's ear; but, fortunately, being widely aimed, did not touch him. The Englishman, resting his revolver muzzle on his left arm, fired carefully, and, luckily, hit his enemy full in the chest; whereupon the man flung up his hands and fell splash into the water. The rowers, startled at this, paused for a moment; and in that time Maurice ran his boat

ashore, and, giving Gurt, who could not walk, into the care of the two Melnosians, one of whom was unhurt, and the other only wounded in the arm, thrust Gurt's cutlass into the hand of the remaining one, and began to retreat slowly up the hill.

Alcibiades' boat was yet far distant, but the one near shore, its rowers having recovered from their surprise at the loss of their leader, landed in a few minutes, and began to run with great rapidity after the fugitives. The Melnosians shouted with right good will for help, and, while retreating slowly, Maurice managed to drop one of his pursuers with his remaining cartridge. They had now nothing left to fight with but a sword and cutlass, both of which were useless against the rifles carried by their pursuers, and the look-out was all the worse, as Captain Alcibiades, with a new crew of cut-throats, had now landed on the beach.

The two Melnosians hurried Gurt along as quickly as possible, the other wounded man ran ahead, shouting for help, and Maurice, with the remaining islander, covered the retreat with stern determination. Several shots sung past them, but their pursuers were evidently bad marksmen, and they gained the entrance of the gorge unharmed.

The palisade now could be seen some little distance away, and the foremost fugitive had nearly reached it, so Maurice took heart, in spite of the near proximity of Alcibiades and his men. In his heart, however, he was praying that Crispin might be still at his post, as, if he were not, the whole four of them would certainly be murdered on the spot.

One of his pursuers was now close at hand, and raised his rifle to the shoulder ; but Maurice, with sudden inspiration, threw himself flat on his face, and the ball passed over his head. Then, springing to his feet, he commenced to run rapidly after his companions, followed by the baffled marksman, who did not wait to reload.

Maurice heard a shout of joy from the palisade, so knew that Crispin was on the spot, and would bring him help ; but at this moment the foremost man caught up with him. The Englishman slashed at his neck with his sabre, but the wily Greek dodged lightly, and, clubbing his musket, brought it down on Roylands' head with tremendous force. Instinctively Maurice put up his sword to guard himself, but the weapon shivered to pieces under the blow, and, stunned by the stroke, he fell insensible to the ground.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE WARNING OF HEPHAISTOS.

*Hence, ye mortals! hence away!  
Dare not on this isle to stay;  
For in grim seclusion here  
I a mighty forge would rear,  
So that in this sea-girt grove  
I can work for mighty Jove.  
Thunder-bolts doth he require,  
Swift to follow lightning's fire,  
When his wrath he would assuage,  
And on mortals wreak his rage.  
Never more will Melnos isle  
With the corn of Ceres smile;  
From its crater flames will rise,  
Roaring to the frightened skies;  
Bubbling from the depths below,  
In its cup will lava glow;  
And the sea around will boil  
At my never-ceasing toil:  
Therefore, mortals, haste away!  
Dare not on this isle to stay.*



WHEN Maurice came to himself, he was lying on the grass inside the palisade, and Crispin was bending over him with the greatest solicitude. His head ached dully with

the effects of the blow, and the blood was clotted in a nasty scalp-wound on the right side of his skull, where the butt of the musket had struck him. Dizzy as he was, yet by a violent effort he managed to sit up and inquire in a feeble voice what had become of the companions of his flight.

‘Oh, they are all right, Maurice!’ said Crispin, holding out his brandy-flask. ‘Take a drink of this, and lie down again for a time.’

Maurice did as he was told, and resumed his recumbent attitude on the grass; but, anxious to know everything, looked inquiringly at Crispin, who at once replied to his mute questioning.

‘I have been here ever since you left for the tunnel this morning,’ explained the poet quickly, ‘as Justinian sent word by Temistocles that I was on no account to forsake my post. We heard your pistol-shots and cries for help, but thought it was some stratagem on the part of the enemy. Then Theodore, whom you sent on for aid, made his appearance at the barricade, and gasped out some incoherent story. As soon as I ascertained it was you, I sallied out with some men, and saw Gurt being helped up the hill, and yourself, with Basil, protecting the rear. Alcibiades and some



others were scrambling up after you ; and then we saw you engage with that foremost blackguard. He knocked you over, and would have finished you, but for Dick, who took a pot shot, and bowled him over like a ninepin. Then we rushed up, and brought you here, with Alcibiades and his friends yelling like fiends at the escape of their prey.'

'And Alcibiades?'

'Oh, he and the other fellows have gone back in the boats to the eastern harbour, I suppose. Jove! I was never so surprised in my life as when I saw you scudding up that hill, for both Justinian and myself thought you were dead!'

'Does Justinian know I am alive?'

'Yes. I sent Temistocles off to tell him as soon as you were in safety ; I expect he'll be here every minute.'

'What about the earthquake?'

'Oh, we felt it, I can tell you. It was a tremendous shock, and has filled up the tunnel completely.'

'At which, I suppose, my uncle is heart-broken?'

'No fear. He never thought about the tunnel while you were in danger. But how did you manage to escape?'

'That is a long story,' said Maurice faintly, for he felt sick with fatigue. 'Give me some more brandy.'

‘Here you are. Don’t talk any more till Justinian comes.’

‘But tell me, where is Gurt?’

‘Oh, he and the rest have gone off to the Acropolis to be looked after. Now, do be quiet, Maurice, or you’ll be fainting again.’

Roylands closed his eyes, and obeyed; while Crispin, with a sponge and water, brought by the swift-footed Temistocles, carefully bathed the wound, and dexterously bound it up with lint and linen, so that Maurice felt more comfortable.

‘It’s only a flesh wound,’ he said in a satisfied tone; ‘but it is a mercy you did not get your head smashed.’

‘What is the time?’

‘Nearly ten o’clock in the morning. You’ve been fighting all night, so I don’t wonder you are dead beat. The sun will be up over the eastern peaks soon.’

It was indeed long after dawn, for in the darkness of the tunnel no one had taken any count of the hours; and when the earthquake had occurred it was just that time between the fading night and the coming day. So upset and excited had Maurice been with the fight, the earthquake, and the escape, that neither he nor any one else remembered that the fighting had begun at midnight, and lasted till

sunrise. And now he remembered that the sun had risen while they were rounding the angle of the island ; but, having been oblivious to the flight of time, he had not thought this strange. It was a great blessing that they had escaped in the boat at daylight ; else even in the luminous night it would have been difficult, with the sea in such a perturbed condition, to have made the voyage safely.

Very shortly Justinian arrived, full of thankfulness for Maurice's escape, and fear concerning his wound ; but by this time the young man, though much shaken, was quite himself again ; and, leaning on the Demarch's arm, with occasional assistance from Crispin, managed to crawl along as far as the Acropolis, where they were joyously received by Helena.

As the tunnel was now completely closed up, there was no chance of the pirates getting in that way ; so Justinian sent all his men over to the Western Pass, where, under the command of Dick, they remained on guard. The women from the village came up the first thing in the morning with provisions and wine to minister to their wants ; so, thus, everything being in order for the present, the Demarch was anxious to hear all the details of his nephew's miraculous escape.

He told them the whole story over the breakfast-table, with occasional help from Gurt, who was admitted to the symposium on account of his bravery during the battle. The old Demarch, self-contained both by nature and training, did not say much during the recital, beyond expressing his heart-felt joy at the escape of his nephew, but it could easily be seen that he was inordinately proud of Maurice's prowess and promptitude of action; for, though the hero himself modestly suppressed such details as tended to self-glorification, Gurt, in his blunt sailor way, came out with the true unvarnished facts of the case, which caused Maurice to blush, and his audience to exclaim admiringly.

'By Jove, Maurice, you ought to be a V.C.!' cried Crispin, when the story came to an end. 'If you hadn't had your wits about you, and seized that boat, you would have been a dead man to a certainty!'

'It is the Roylands blood!' said Justinian proudly. 'I knew I was not mistaken in my estimate of your character, Maurice. You will make an admirable ruler of Melnos!'

'That is, if there is any Melnos to rule over,' replied Maurice with an uneasy laugh; 'for, by Jove,

uncle, when that earthquake came, I thought everything had gone to kingdom come.'

'Ah, you see, father, I was right about the earthquake last night!' said Helena in triumph; 'I felt that something was going to happen!'

'Yes, but you thought it would be an eruption,' answered Justinian, with apparent indifference, though there was an anxious look on his face; 'as to an earthquake, why, these Greek islands are all volcanic, so that means nothing.'

'How did you get on after I left you, uncle?'

'Why, I set my men to work, to build up the barricade again, with turf and bags of sand. You were a long time gone, my son, and I became afraid that you had been cut to pieces, so, when the work was done, I intended taking some men and going after you. Then the earthquake occurred, and we heard the fall of the roof at the cliff entrance. I thought you were dead for sure, and cannot tell you of the anguish I felt at your loss. However, Temistocles brought me the news of your safe arrival at the Western Pass, and I breathed freely again. Oh, my dear Maurice,' continued the Demarch, taking his nephew's hand, 'how fervently do I thank God that you are alive! for if those scoundrels had killed

you, indeed I do not think I would have had the heart to continue living in Melnos.'

Maurice was greatly touched with his uncle's emotion, which was a rare thing for the iron old Demarch to display, for as a rule he took both good and bad fortune with the utmost equanimity, and seldom gave any outward signs of his feelings on such occasions. His nephew, however, was very dear to his heart, and he looked upon him with great pride, both as his future son-in-law and successor, so it had been a terrible blow to him, to think he had lost a young man on whom all his future hopes depended.

As for Helena, she said nothing, but, genuine offspring of her father as she was, bore up pluckily, though it could be plainly seen that she had suffered much during the absence of her lover. Fortunately, the time which had elapsed between Maurice's supposed death and subsequent reappearance had been too short to permit of her knowing of the calamity, else, brave as she was, she would certainly have given way under such a cruel misfortune. As it was, however, he now sat beside her safe and sound, so all the terrible events which he detailed with such coolness only seemed to be some hideous nightmare which had vanished at the coming of morning.

She insisted upon Maurice's going to bed for a good sleep after breakfast, in which insistence she was supported by her father, who saw that Maurice was more shaken by his late fatigue than he chose to acknowledge.

'You can sleep for a few hours at all events, my son,' he said affectionately, 'for Alcibiades has lost too many men to think about making another attack, at least for some time.'

'Are you not going to sleep yourself?'

'No, I am going down to the valley to look at those hot springs. This earthquake has rather unnerved me, and I wish to see for myself if there is any probability of an eruption. Crispin, will you come with me?'

'If you desire it; but, to tell you the truth, I also am rather tired.'

'Pshaw!' said the man of iron, with good-humoured scorn; 'you have no stamina, Crispin. If you had been through all that Maurice has undergone, you might talk. However, take your sleep for an hour or so.'

Crispin really was very delicately constituted, and could not do without that sleep which Justinian despised, but, in order to be ready for any emergency,

he curled himself up on a divan in the court, and rested there without removing his clothes. Maurice, on the contrary, completely worn out with fatigue and anxiety, to say nothing of his scalp wound, went straight to bed, and slept soundly most of the day, while Helena, tenderly solicitous of his comfort, watched beside him the whole time, with her little hand lying in his warm grasp.

Meanwhile, Justinian, who, in spite of his age, scarcely seemed to feel the effect of the previous night's vigil, took a cold bath to freshen himself up, and then started on a journey of inspection round the island. Like a careful general, his first visit was to the outposts at the Western Pass, where he found everything in an extremely satisfactory condition. Part of the men were sleeping, while the others kept guard, waiting to take their turn of rest when their comrades awoke. Notwithstanding the hard fighting, all those who had been engaged in the defence of the tunnel seemed in a wonderfully good condition, while Dick and his nine sailors, hardened by a seafaring life, seemed to feel no fatigue whatsoever, in spite of constant watchfulness and anxiety.

With a view to seeing the position of the enemy, Justinian climbed up a small path which led to the



hills from the inner side of the outward palisade, and, using his field-glass, soon discovered that Alcibiades was concentrating his forces below in order to storm the pass. Boat after boat filled with desperadoes came sweeping round the breakwater into the smooth sea of the harbour, and tents were being erected on the beach by the besiegers. Evidently they had discovered that there was no chance of entering by the tunnel, which was completely blocked up by the fallen rocks, so were determined to effect an entrance by the Western Pass, where at least they would have the advantage of fighting in daylight. Carefully surveying the disorderly host, Justinian calculated that there still remained about two hundred men, against whom he could only bring ninety-five or thereabouts. Still, entrenched behind his barricades, and having the pass commanded by two cannon, he thought the invaders would find it somewhat difficult to dislodge him from such a strong position, the more so as they lacked discipline, and their leaders were quite ignorant of military tactics.

Having ascertained all this, Justinian descended into the gorge again, where he gave Dick his final instructions, which were simply to keep a sharp lookout on the enemy, and, in the event of seeing any

movement uphill towards the mouth of the pass, to at once send off Temistocles to the Acropolis with the information.

Dick having promised faithfully to obey these instructions, the Demarch, escorted by a couple of his men, went along the mulberry avenue, in order to survey the tunnel, which he had not entered since driven from thence by the earthquake some hours previous. The electric light was turned off, as the Demarch, now that the danger lay more in the west than the east, judged it advisable to reserve all the power of the dynamo for the one light which swept the Western Pass, and therefore, bidding his men take torches, went downward into the darkness of the tunnel with such illumination only.

Passing down to the ruins of the palisade, where so fierce a fight had taken place, he crossed that boundary, and, turning the angle of the staircase, came in sight of the landslip caused by the earthquake. The red flare of the torches but feebly showed the amount of damage done, yet Justinian saw sufficient to assure him that there was no chance of the tunnel being made use of again for at least some months. Extending from the cliff entrance to some considerable distance back, the whole roof had

collapsed, and tons of *débris* piled upward from floor to vault completely sealed up the mouth of the passage. It would take a goodly amount of dynamite and blasting powder to remove those massive blocks ; and, now that he knew Maurice was safe, the Demarch had time to grieve over the damage done to his beloved tunnel. Justinian, however, was too practical a man to waste time in useless lamentation, and promptly decided that, as soon as Alcibiades was beaten back,—an event which he was assured would come off without much difficulty,—he would set gangs of men to clear away the obstruction, and restore, with as little delay as possible, the tunnel to its pristine excellence. The burning of the palisade also had taught him a lesson, and, to obviate the chances of such defence being destroyed by fire, he decided to build a kind of stone bastion in the same place, with loopholes for guns, and also to fortify it with two field-pieces, which would simply mow down an enemy advancing up the staircase.

The inspection of the tunnel being concluded, Justinian returned upward to the light of day, and descended the grand staircase in order to pay a visit to the springs. He looked upon these as a kind of thermometer, useful in warning him of seismic

disturbances, for, in spite of the long silence of the volcano, Justinian knew that the subterranean forces were still at work under the crust which covered the crater; and with the remembrance of the great eruption of Vesuvius, in the year '79, constantly in his mind, was not without certain fears that this long-slumbering monster might re-awaken from the sleep of centuries. The volcanic forces, however, having a vent in the adjacent island of Santorin, he had hitherto calculated that Melnos would remain quiescent, but the terrible earthquake which had so unexpectedly occurred inspired him with great uneasiness, and he was in deadly fear lest it should prelude the renewed activity of the mountain.

As before described, the hot springs of Melnos somewhat resembled the geysers of Iceland, save that they were less active, and did not send up jets of water to any great height from their uncanny mouths. On this day, however, when the Demarch approached the desolate gorge where they had hitherto rested as slightly bubbling pools of water, he was astonished and dismayed to find them in full activity. Clouds of thin steam almost obscured the yellow, red, and green lava of the rocks behind, and amid this ominous vapour the springs were spouting furiously

at intervals. Thick jets of boiling water would gush up from the ragged clefts in the sulphur-streaked blocks to a considerable height, and, after expending their fury, would sink down again into the bowels of the earth. After a time the muttered bellowing of the monsters would be heard, then amid groanings and gurglings, which told of the colossal forces at work beneath, the great columns of water would again shoot skyward with hideous roars.

The Demarch noticed this unusual disturbance of the springs with great uneasiness, as during his whole forty years' residence on the island never had there been such signs of danger. Even where he stood, the earth was cracked in many places, and little jets of steam escaped with a whistling noise, which could be heard shrilly when the bellowing of the geysers ceased. The Melnosians were in a terrible state of alarm, and it took all Justinian's eloquence to persuade them that this was simply a local disturbance caused by the earthquake, and that there was no danger of an outbreak on the part of the long-sleeping volcano.

Truth to tell, in spite of his speech, he was not at all easy in his mind as he climbed up the staircase to the Acropolis, for these ominous signs boded but ill

for the safety of the island, and he dreaded lest without further warning the crater should burst out into full fury, in which case every being therein would certainly be killed. He was unwilling, however, to communicate his fears to Helena or to Maurice, and thus disturb their minds at this critical period of the siege; but, feeling that he must have some one with whom to talk, awoke Crispin from his siesta, and, taking him into his own room, gave him a description of the geysers' activity.

'The deuce!' said Crispin in dismay, when he heard this unpleasant recital. 'I hope we are not going to have the destruction of Pompeii over again; but I must say it seems uncommonly like it!'

'Do you think Melnos will break out again?'

'Those spouting geysers certainly don't bode any good, sir, nor that earthquake either. Perhaps it is a warning from Hephaistos that we had better leave the island.'

'I won't leave the island,' said Justinian obstinately, drawing his iron-grey brows together; 'after forty years of incessant toil, I would indeed be a coward to leave Melnos simply because things look a trifle ominous.'

'Yes; but volcanoes are delicate things to deal with. These signs are slight; but who knows but that they

may be followed by a blowing up of the crater's crust, in which case I am afraid everything in connection with Melnos will be at an end.'

'But the volcano has been extinct for thousands of years!'

'So was Vesuvius,' replied Crispin coolly, 'and that mountain in New Zealand—Tarawera, was it not?—that awoke to activity after centuries of quiescence. You can't trust volcanoes, sir. They are most treacherous monsters, and when least expected break out in full fury.'

'An eruption is going on at Thera.'

'All the more reason that the volcanic action will extend to Melnos.'

'There I don't agree with you. If the subterranean forces find vent in one place, there is less chance of them breaking out in another. Besides, Thera has always been active. Herodotus, Apollonius, and Plutarch all speak of previous eruptions. Then there was one in 1457, when the Venetians occupied the island; another in 1707; and I think the last outburst took place in 1866.'

'Well, according to Georgios, there is one going on now, which is a bad sign for us.'

'On the contrary, a good sign. Don't you see,

Crispin, that, whereas Thera has burst out every hundred years or so for many centuries, there is no record of Melnos being active. This temple of Hephaistos was built long before Christ, during the supremacy of Hellas in these seas, and had the crater not been extinct then, it could not have been built on the inner cup, nor could any eruption have taken place since, as it would have been destroyed ; so, as the mountain, to all appearances, has been extinct for thousands of years, and the volcanic forces find vent at Thera, I really do not see why, because of an earthquake and a spouting geyser, we should think it likely the crater will break out again.'

'Still, you see the Hellenes must have known this was a volcanic island, and, perhaps, put up this temple to the god of fire in memory of an eruption. If I remember rightly, the Rhodians built a temple to Poseidon Asphalios after some early eruption, in order to propitiate the gods ; so this shrine may have been erected for a similar reason.'

'Scarcely, if the volcano was active then. I don't think even the pious Hellenes would have risked their lives in building a temple under the very nose of Vulcan in full work. But what do you think is best to be done ?'



‘Well, certainly it would be foolish to leave Melnos, after all the work you have expended upon it, without very good reason, and, until something more serious occurs, I should be inclined to remain. In spite of these signs, the volcano has been as quiet as a lamb for thousands of years; so I do not see why it should break out now, save out of sheer contrariness. We had better go on defending Melnos from Alcibiades, and take no notice of the volcano; but if anything serious occurs, we must get away as quickly as possible.’

‘But how? Alcibiades has destroyed all our boats.’

‘Well, we will seize his; or else, as soon as I can guess *The Eunice* is at Syra, I will go over and bring her to Melnos; so that in case of danger I can save every one.’

‘Over a hundred and fifty people! Impossible!’

‘There won’t be a hundred and fifty people by the time Alcibiades is beaten,’ replied Crispin drily. ‘It is not that I am afraid of; but if such a contingency as the volcano becoming active does arise, my difficulty will be to get through the besieging army out into the open sea.’

‘I’m afraid there’s no chance of that,’ replied the Demarch gloomily.

‘Well, it certainly looks impossible, but there’s nothing like trying. However, there may be no necessity for such daring. Don’t trouble about the volcano, Justinian; I’ve no doubt Hephaistos will warn us again before proceeding to extremities.’

‘I am of the same opinion myself. Still, your words have given no great comfort, Crispin; for, after all the money and labour expended on this island, it would indeed be a terrible thing if it became nothing but a smoking mass of black lava, to say nothing of the destruction of my schemes.’

‘You won’t tell Maurice or Helena of this?’

‘No. Maurice has quite enough on his mind already, and it would only frighten Helena to death. She is brave enough at most dangers, but I think a volcanic eruption would frighten the most stout-hearted. I have to a great extent calmed the feelings of those in the village, so it will be best for you and I to keep our own counsel, and not uselessly alarm our friends.’

‘I hope it is a useless alarm,’ said Crispin uneasily. ‘But it is a very unpleasant idea to think that one is living on top of a powder-magazine which may explode at any moment.’

‘As far as that goes,’ answered the Demarch drily,

‘the whole globe is nothing but an egg full of fire, and we all live on the surface of an explosive bombshell whirling through space, which may burst at any moment. My island is only a sample of the whole earth.’

‘I wish you wouldn’t look at things in such an unpleasant light,’ cried Crispin laughing. ‘My nerves will be destroyed before I leave this island. However, I am going to finish my sleep.’

‘And Maurice?’

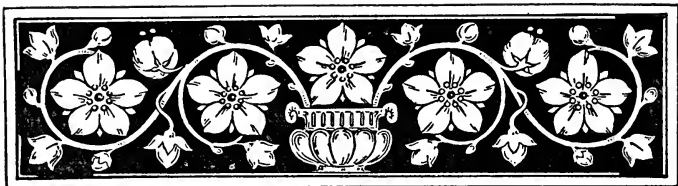
‘He also is asleep, and I’ve no doubt will wake up quite fit for another midnight attack.’

‘Egad, and he’ll get it!’ said the Demarch grimly. ‘That villain Alcibiades is getting ready for another assault.’

‘Well, in spite of the benefits conferred, it is to be hoped Hephaistos won’t interfere this time with his earthquakes.’

‘He has warned us twice,’ replied Justinian, as he walked out into the court with the poet; ‘once by the earthquake, again by the springs. Heaven help us when the third warning comes!’

‘Oh, there’s luck in odd numbers,’ said Crispin flippantly. ‘And, in any case, if we come to grief, our enemies will be in the same plight as ourselves.’



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE INVOCATION OF ARTEMIS.

*O Moon! thou risest from the western seas,  
A virgin Aphrodite fair and chaste,  
And by thy votaress on bended knees  
These stainless flowers are on thine altar placed:  
Pale lilies, roses wan, and cyclamen,  
Whose petals have ensnared thy pallid rays;  
Frail hyacinth as chill as mountain snows  
Beneath thy wintry ken;  
With many blossoms plucked in dewy ways,  
For thee, O goddess! who canst end my woes.*

*O Moon! I pray thee in thy tenderness,  
Watch with thy silver eye my lover gone,  
And soothe him with thy virginal caress,  
For thou hadst also an Endymion.  
Astarte! Dian! Tanith! Artemis!  
Whate'er men name thee in thy mystic might,  
With sacrifice and songs I worship thee;  
So grant, O Moon! the bliss  
Of feeling in my heart the pure delight,  
Which tells my love is coming back to me.*



VIDENTLY Alcibiades had but little stomach for midnight fighting, for he made no attempt to storm the pass under the cover of darkness, and was apparently making

preparations to begin the fight at the first flush of the dawn. In thus deciding, he was wiser than he knew, for many of his men had been killed in the tunnel by their own friends, owing to the confusion which prevailed during the retreat down the staircase. Moreover, with the electric light showing the position of the enemy to the defenders, and dazzling their eyesight when they advanced to the attack, there was nothing to be gained by a night sortie, and Alcibiades thought it best to storm the pass by day, so that he, at least in the matter of light, might have the same advantage as Justinian.

All day long, the Demarch and his nephew posted themselves on the heights above the gorge, and from their vantage, with the aid of strong field-glasses, saw the preparations which were being made for the final attack. Alcibiades, with more military precision than of yore, had divided his two hundred men into two bodies, one of which was commanded by himself and the other by Count Caliphronas. Under these two leaders were four other commanders responsible for fifty troops each, but these deferred to Caliphronas and Alcibiades, while the Count in his turn took his orders from the old pirate as the supreme head of the whole army.

Without doubt, Alcibiades desired to attack the island in two separate places, for he knew, thanks to the treachery of Caliphronas, that Justinian's force was too few in numbers to admit of division, and thus, while the one body was attacking the palisade in the gorge, the other could get at the rear of the Melnosians by another way. Unfortunately for this daring scheme, the cliffs on either side of the pass were perfectly inaccessible, as they arose smooth and arid from the beach to the height of two hundred feet, and as the besiegers had not wings, they could scarcely hope to climb up these sterile steeps, which would not have afforded foothold even for a goat. The only path available for this plan was perfectly well known to Caliphronas, but, unluckily for the besiegers, was inside the outer palisade, from whence it wound up to the heights where the Demarch and his nephew were seated, and from thence went through the altar glade, down to the back of the Acropolis.

Once the outer defence was taken, Caliphronas intended to lead his century of men up this secret way, which he knew thoroughly, and thus gain the heart of the island as exemplified by the Acropolis, while the Demarch was keeping back the feigned attack at the stockade. This stratagem was very

clever and very feasible, but the difficulty in carrying it out consisted in the fact that, before the path could be ascended, the outer defence would have to be taken, which was no easy task, when defended by such determined men as the Melnosians. However, it was to all appearances the only chance of gaining speedy possession of the island, without risking prolonged fighting; so Alcibiades adopted the plan without hesitation, and arranged with his subordinates to assault the palisade at early dawn, carry it with a dash, and then, while he made a feigned attack at the inner defence, Caliphronas and his men, gaining the interior of the island by this path, could attack the defending party in the rear.

It never for a moment struck Messrs. Alcibiades & Company that Justinian was far too wide awake not to have thought of this contingency, and had made his preparations in consequence. The entrance of the path from the gorge was up a narrow, winding staircase, cut in the live rock, which could only hold two men abreast, so, in the event of the outer defence being beaten down, this staircase could be easily defended by a dozen or so of men. Added to this, an iron gate closely locked was placed at the entrance; therefore, even if the enemy did gain an entrance

into the pass, they had considerable difficulties to overcome before marching in triumph into the Acropolis. Justinian would, indeed, have been a bad general had he not foreseen this danger, but even though he thus guarded against it to the best of his ability, he trusted that his men would be able to hold the outer defence until Alcibiades retired in discomfiture.

As a matter of fact, the fiery old adventurer would have liked nothing better than to sally forth at the head of his handful of men and drive his enemy into the sea, but he was no longer the reckless Rudolph Roylands of the past, and judged it best to be cautious, nor risk the chance of a pitched battle in the open with unequal numbers. Entrenched in the strong out-works of the pass, his little band could hope to face their enemies with more than a fair chance of victory, but if he was foolish enough to make a sally, his ninety-five men would, in spite of their bravery, be quickly cut to pieces by more than double the number. Of course their military precision would doubtless tell against the undisciplined hordes of Alcibiades ; still the risk was too great, and Justinian, much as he desired to make a bold dash for victory, deemed it best to take advantage of all the shelter and advantage his fortification afforded.



The Western Pass was not unlike the tunnel in conformation, for, extending from inside to outside, a distance of a quarter of a mile, it ran upward from the cliffs of the beach for some little way, then, turning in an abrupt angle, pursued a straight way into the interior of the crater. Evidently created by a volcanic eruption for the outlet of lava, the sides, rent apart by some convulsion, arose precipitous and sterile to the height of over two hundred feet. No vegetation softened the nakedness of these rugged rocks, which, streaked with green, yellow, and red, presented a singularly forbidding appearance. On the top grew ancient pines, whose sombre branches, nearly touching one another as they stretched across the gulf, only permitted a thin streak of sky to be seen; so that the depths below were singularly gloomy, and to the imaginative Hellenes might well have suggested the thought that it was the Gate of Hades, by which name it was traditionally known. Justinian, however, abandoned such cognomen as of evil omen, and called it 'The Western Pass,' by which title it was generally known by the Melnosians. It was indeed a remarkably eerie place even on the brightest day, and the light which filtered downward from between the branches of the pines but half revealed, in a glimmer-

ing gloom, the horrent rocks, the lack of flowers and grasses, and the chill, grim appearance of the whole tremendous cleft.

Maurice, having slept all day, felt wonderfully refreshed when he awoke, just as the sun set, and, though his head was still painful with the wound, yet his brain was perfectly bright and clear; so, after making a hearty meal, he started with his uncle and Crispin for the Western Pass, where he was to remain all night. The enemy might, or might not, make a night attack, and Justinian rather inclined to the belief that they would wait till daylight. Nevertheless, to guard against any chance of such a thing occurring, he resolved that every one, both leaders and men, should remain in the pass during the hours of darkness.

The men thus being at the front, a number of the women were sleeping up at the Acropolis with Helena, so as to be near their relations, and the interior of the island was thus given over entirely to feminine influence; while the extreme end of the pass, near to the outer palisade, was occupied by the male defenders. At times the sunlight came into this cliff entrance, so there was a scanty vegetation for some distance inward, so on this sparse grass Justinian and his men made themselves comfortable. Many of the soldiers,

wearied out with watching, were sleeping around, but there was a strong guard at the barricade, under the command of Gurt, who was much better, and had insisted upon coming to the front.

Round a fire, sat the Demarch, his nephew, Crispin, and Dick, all talking earnestly about the coming struggle, for the bos'n, having snatched a few hours of sleep during the afternoon, was now quite alert and active. The fire was lighted more for the sake of comfort than for protection against the cold, though, indeed, the bottom of this abyss was chilly enough, and the cheerful flames flickered redly in the intense darkness, while high above glimmered the pale stars, and to the right arose the frowning mass of the palisade black against the faint gleam of the luminous night. To their nostrils came the salt savour of the sea, and at intervals they could hear the songs and revelry of their foes on the beach below. What with the recumbent forms of the sleeping men, the firelight hollowing out a space for itself in the blackness, and the intense stillness of the night, broken only by the pacing of the sentries, and the fitful snatches of song from the near distance, the whole scene was extraordinarily weird, so much so, that Crispin, with his impressionable poet's nature, soon relapsed into silence.

‘Crispin, why don’t you think of business?’ said Maurice mischievously, as he noticed the poet’s abstraction.

‘I was thinking of—of—other things.’

‘My niece for instance,’ observed the Demarch, with a grave smile.

‘It’s not improbable,’ replied Crispin, reddening a trifle; ‘but, after all, I am in good company, for Maurice is doubtless thinking of Helena.’

Maurice, smiling, did not deny this remarkably accurate guess, and his uncle, smoothing his silver beard, laughed silently.

‘I’m afraid Dick and myself are the only persons who are thinking of war.’

‘I’m certain of it as far as you are concerned, but I will not answer for Dick there.’

‘Dick, Dick!’ said Justinian, shaking his head gravely; ‘what is this I hear?’

‘About Zoe, sir,’ answered the bos’n innocently.

‘Oh, it is my daughter’s maid!’

‘Well, you see, sir,’ said Dick bashfully, ‘it was like this, sir. Zoe, you see, gentlemen, likes me, and I like Zoe; so, with your permission, Mr. Justinian, we were thinking of marriage.’

‘My permission!’ echoed the Demarch with a

lurking smile ; 'as far as that goes, it doesn't seem to be needed. This is surely pairing time, for you three young men seem to be all choosing mates. Eunice, Helena, Zoe ! Maurice, when your old tutor arrives, we must have a triple marriage.'

'We've got to drive away Alcibiades first, uncle.'

'No doubt; but that, though difficult, is not impossible.'

'I hope not. Crispin, wake up, sir ! You are thinking about Eunice again.'

'Indeed I am not,' answered Crispin with some dismay. 'I am thinking of my revolver, which I have left behind at the Acropolis.'

'There's a warrior for you,' said the Demarch with a hearty laugh ; 'he forgets the modern substitute for a shield. Well, my lad, as your revolver is an important matter, you had better go back and get it.'

Crispin jumped gaily to his feet.

'I'll go at once,' he said, putting on his sombrero ; 'but I hope the battle will not begin without me.'

'I think you may make up your mind there will be no row till dawn, sir,' said Dick, who was peering between the bars of the palisade ; 'there would not be all that kick-up going on down there if they meant business.'

‘In that case,’ observed Maurice, rising slowly, ‘I think I’ll go back for your revolver, Crispin.’

‘Or for your heart,’ replied the poet laughing.

‘Oh, I don’t wish to bring that back, especially in war-time. It is safer with Helena. Uncle, can I go?’

‘By all means. I agree with Dick, and do not think there is any chance of a night attack. However, you had better make haste to come back to your post.’

*‘So Paris flies harsh war’s alarms  
For dalliance in fair Helen’s arms.’*

‘Crispin, keep your rude couplets to yourself, or I’ll forget to bring back your revolver. Adieu, gentlemen. I will return anon.’

Maurice stalked away up the gorge, like a tragedy actor, much to the amusement of Justinian. Indeed, this light-hearted, desultory conversation did a good deal to keep up their spirits, and, in spite of the serious danger at their gates, all the Englishmen were wonderfully merry. It is characteristic of the British, that, if they take their pleasures solemnly, they keep the balance even by being gay in the presence of danger, and he who doubts the truth of this statement has only to read Kinglake’s account of the battle of the Alma, in order to assure himself of its truth.

As before mentioned, the gorge was very dark, but

Maurice knew every inch of the way, and, being sure-footed as a goat, never stumbled in his step, but strode merrily along in the darkness, whistling 'Garryowen.' It was curious, amid all this Greek life, revival of paganism, and piratical invasion, to hear the quaint Irish air, but Maurice found it an admirable melody to which to march, and moved his legs so rapidly to the tune, that in a very short space of time he emerged from the pass into the moonlit road skirting the crater.

It was only about ten o'clock in the evening, and the moon, full and round, burned like a lamp in the sky near the Milky Way, which she was slowly drawing near. Brightly gleamed Sirius amid the feebler twinkle of minor stars, and eastward like a ruby glittered Mars, the planet of the soldier, foreboding war and blood. The wind gently moved the branches of the mulberry trees above the head of the pedestrian, and, moderating his pace, he strolled lazily along the shadow-strewn road, while the nightingales singing in every thicket, thrilled his heart with their delicious notes.

Soon, however, another song mingled with theirs, a strange, wild melody, which, chanted in a clear, high voice, arose and fell sadly in the chill moonlight ;

then an imploring chorus of voices sounded in unison. Again the one singer cried in an appealing manner ; then silence and the hurried notes of the hidden birds.

Curious to know the meaning of this strange singing, Maurice walked rapidly onward, bounded up the steps of the Acropolis, and entered into the vestibule. The music, shrill and fitful, sounded close at hand, so, stealthily approaching the curtains hanging before the entrance to the court, Roylands peered in, to discover the reason of such fantastic melodies. He was evidently disturbing the mysteries of the Bona Dea, for the court was thronged with women, and they seemed to be engaged in the performance of some rite—a kind of invocation to the moon, which appeared shining brilliantly in the sky through the hypæthral opening of the building.

A small brazier filled with burning coals, and elevated on a tripod, stood near the fountain, before which stood Helena, in her long white robe, with loosely-flowing hair and slender arms outstretched towards the serene planet above. Around the court knelt a number of Melnosian women in their long chitons ; but Maurice's eyes were fastened on that beautiful central figure which stood so motionless before the tripod. The moonlight softly fell on her



lovely upturned face, on her snowy robe, her milky arms, and touched with chilly beam the disordered gold of her hair. Maurice, who felt that he was looking on at some ceremony not meant for masculine eyes, would have stepped forward and announced his presence, but at that moment Helena broke out into a song so wild and thrilling, that he involuntarily paused in amazement. The words were in Greek, but he was now sufficiently master of the language to understand them. It was evidently some antique invocation to the inviolate Artemis, and he wondered where she could have discovered them, as they rippled from her lips, rising and falling with fitful sobbings, like the voice of some complaining wind on a lonely beach.

*Helena.*

*O waning moon! why hidest thou thy face?  
Fair is the night, but less fair than my lover absent;  
Unveil thyself from the jealous cloud-woof,  
And thou wilt see how fair is he I worship.*

*Chorus.*

*O Dian! sun of the lovers' night, I call thee.*

*Helena.*

*Thou canst control the tides of ocean,  
The tides obedient who are slaves to thee,  
Surely then thou canst control the heart of my lover,  
And make him long to return to my arms so loving.*

*Chorus.*

*O Baalit! mistress of the tides, I call thee.*

*Helena.*

*Save him from danger, for he is daring, my lover,  
He rides the surges of battle as thou ridest the flying clouds.  
Save him, Tanith!  
And bring him safely to the arms of her who calleth.*

*Chorus.*

*O Ashtoreth! thou also hast loved! I call thee.*

At this moment, Helena took something from her bosom, and, throwing a few grains of incense on the coals, held it in the thick white smoke which arose. Afterwards she advanced to the fountain and dipped it thrice, singing all the time that strange melody.

*Helena.*

*This amber heart I place in the rising odours,  
So that thy virtues may pass into it;  
Thrice do I dip it in lustrous water in which thou hast beheld  
thine image;  
For thus will it draw the magic from thy bosom.  
On my lover's neck will I place it—on his beating heart will it rest,  
And it will save him when red runs the blood of battle.*

*Chorus.*

*Hecate! controller of spells, I call thee.*

When she had finished, the chorus of women arose to their feet, and slowly filed out of one of the side doors, leaving the court empty, and Helena still standing by the brazier, from whence the burning incense still rolled skyward. Maurice, quite astonished at this strange scene of magical incantation,

stole quietly forward, and, looking over her shoulder, saw that she was gazing at the amber heart, which she had converted into an amulet by her moon spells.

‘Helena!’

She turned with a cry of astonishment, and then fell into his arms with a joyous laugh.

‘Oh, Maurice! my dearest! my darling! Are the old stories true, and have my spells drawn you back to my side?’

She was much excited, so Maurice drew her gently to one of the chairs near the fountain, and, placing her therein, knelt at her feet, smoothing her two hands, which he held between his own, to quieten her alarm at his sudden appearance.

‘My dearest Helena, I came back to fetch Crispin’s revolver, which he has left behind. Hearing you singing, I looked in.’

‘Oh!’ cried Helena, with a blush; ‘and what did you see?’

‘Nothing very dreadful,’ he replied laughing. ‘I only saw a symposium of women, and felt like Clodius surveying the mysteries of the Bona Dea. What on earth were you doing?’

‘Oh, it was only a game, Maurice,’ she replied, burying her head on his shoulder. ‘I am ashamed

you should have seen me acting so childishly, but, the fact is, there is a woman here who told me about it.'

'About what?'

'This incantation to the moon. In spite of father's being so particular about purity of blood, some of the women are of Arab descent. This one who told me how to make a talisman comes from Africa, and, I believe, is a descendant of the old Carthaginians.'

'Nonsense! they were all stamped out by the Romans. Well, what about this modern Dido?'

'Well, she saw how anxious I was about you, and told me if I invoked the moon, and bathed some small article in moon-water and incense, it would become endowed with powerful virtues, and protect its wearer from danger.'

'You foolish child!' said Maurice, tenderly stroking her loose hair; 'and was all this mummery on my account?'

'Yes; but if you laugh at it, the talisman will lose its power.'

'Then I'll be as grave as a judge. Where is this wonderful amulet?'

Helena held out the amber heart which lay in the centre of her little white palm, from which Maurice

lifted it daintily, and pressed his moustache against her hand.

‘And am I to wear this?’

‘Round your neck.’

‘But there is nothing to fasten it there.’

‘Oh dear me, I must get some string, or silk, or— Oh,’ she cried, struck with a sudden thought, ‘have you a knife?’

‘No.’

‘Then lend me your sword.’

‘What! are you going to cut my head off for overlooking your Bona Dea ceremonies?’ he said laughingly, drawing the keen weapon from its sheath.

For answer, she arose to her feet, and shook the loose gold of her hair over her shoulders. Carefully selecting one long tress, she smoothed it down with her hands, and held it out towards her lover.

‘Cut it off.’

‘What! your beautiful hair!’ cried Maurice, who stood before her with his sword gleaming in the moonlight. ‘Oh, Helena, I could not do that.’

‘Then give me your sword, and I’ll do it myself.’

‘My dearest, you would hurt yourself. Why do you want to cut this lock?’

‘To make a chain for the heart.’

‘There’s a chain round my heart already,’ said her lover, still hesitating. ‘Won’t it spoil your hair?’

‘Maurice! how tiresome you are! Cut it off at once.’

She stamped her foot with pretty petulance, so, seeing she was obstinate, he carefully sheared off the tress close to her head. This being done, she shook her locks over the shorn place, and, sitting down in her chair once more, began to weave the shining hair into a delicate chain.

‘You silly child, making me despoil you of your glory!’ said Maurice, touched by her action. ‘There, let me put my sword up again, and I will help you.’

‘Hold the end of the chain then, and do not talk, or you will break the charm.’

Maurice, sheathing his sword, knelt down before her, and, taking one end of the glittering coil daintily between finger and thumb, watched her weaving the threads rapidly together, crooning the while a strange old song in a low voice.

*‘Weave the threads of golden hair,  
Golden future also weaving.  
Happy be thy fortunes fair,  
Plenteous joy but scanty grieving.  
In and out, and out and in,  
Thus thy coming life I spin.’*

*Bind the chain to golden heart,  
Golden heart to thee be binding,  
Meet together ne'er to part,  
Love will come with little finding.  
In and out, and out and in,  
Thus thy future life I spin.*

There!' said Helena, having finished the chain;  
'now let me tie up the ends—give me the heart.'

'My heart?'

'I have that already,' she answered mischievously.  
'The amber heart, please; I must bind it to the chain.'

'Where did you learn that song?'

'I made it up all by myself,' said Helena triumphantly, dangling the chain before him. 'Do you think that only Crispin is a poet?'

'No, my Sappho.'

'There is a chain of my hair and a talisman attached to keep you from harm, so bend your head, my knight, and I will give it to you.'

Maurice, entering into the spirit of her charming humour, bowed his head, over which she flung the slender chain of hair, then, kissing him on the forehead, leaned back and clapped her hands gaily.

'There! now you are safe. Nothing can harm you while you wear that.'

'Nothing can harm me while I think of you,' he whispered tenderly, taking her in his arms; 'your love is my safeguard both in peace and war.'

‘Oh dear me!’ sighed Helena, as she pillowed her head on his shoulder; ‘what nonsense it is, Maurice! Still, it’s very pleasant nonsense.’

‘Very pleasant.’

‘And I am very nice?’

‘You are very vain,’ he said, kissing her and rising to his feet. ‘There, you charming sorceress!’

‘A new Circe.’

‘Precisely; but I must not stay with Circe any longer. Let me go to Crispin’s room for his revolver, and then good-bye.’

As quickly as possible he ran into his friend’s bedroom, and found the weapon on the bed, where the neglectful poet had left it. Slipping it into his belt, he came back to say good-bye to Helena.

‘Now mind you go to bed, dear,’ he said, kissing her tenderly; ‘no more magical ceremonies to-night.’

‘No, I will go to bed. Oh, do take care of yourself, Maurice!’

‘I will, both for your sake and my own. Besides, your talisman.’

Helena threw her arms impulsively round his neck.

‘I give you the talisman, and I give you my love.’

He bent down and kissed her, then without a word went away into the moonlit night on his way to battle, and perhaps—death.





## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### A MODERN THERMOPYLÆ.

*In the gap say fifty fighters waiting for the coming shock,  
Guns and sabres, pikes and bayonets holding tight,  
And two hundred stormers dashing up, like surges on a rock,  
With a grim determination for their foes' extermination  
In the fight.*

*Clash of weapons, cannon's thunder, and the rifle's deadly crack,  
Mingle fiercely with the shrieking of the wounded in their pain,  
Till, in spite of all their toiling,  
Valour staunch their efforts foiling,  
Down the slope again recoiling,  
Reels the shattered column back,  
All their dauntlessness in vain,  
And the battle-ground is cumbered with a multitude unnumbered  
Of the slain.*



AT the first flush of dawn in the grey eastern skies, the Melnosians were on the alert and ready for the fight. Owing to the early hour, and the fact of their having passed the night in the open air, many of the men were shivering with cold, on noticing which, Justinian ordered

hot coffee to be served out all round. They also took a light meal, then went through a few evolutions on the narrow space of their bivouac ground, which suppld their limbs, and sent the lethargic blood once more speeding rapidly through their veins. Both Crispin and Maurice felt somewhat stiff, especially the latter, owing to his wound, but the hot coffee, the food, and an indulgence in a few gymnastic exercises soon brought them back to their normal condition of physical fitness. Unlike their less seasoned frames, Justinian's iron constitution never seemed to feel the strain to which it was subjected, and, in spite of his years, he was as brisk and active as the youngest member of his band.

As it was imperative that this outer defence should be held against all odds, owing to the proximity of the side path, the Demarch had the two cannons which were planted inside the second barricade brought down as rapidly as possible, and placed them on either side of the entrance to the gorge, in order to sweep down the enemy as they dashed up the sloping ground from the beach. Their muzzles, protruding from the earthworks, could pour confusion into the ranks of the stormers in a most effective fashion, especially as they were loaded with

grape-shot, which would scatter widely in the discharge. As in the tunnel palisade, a thick wall of turf was built half-way up against the beams, while on this sand-bags and gabions, with loopholes for the rifle barrels, were also laid. The whole front of the battery was therefore bristling with danger to the besiegers, while the garrison, entrenched behind their outworks, were in comparative safety. The inner palisade farther up the pass was defended in a similar manner, saving in the matter of cannon; but Justinian determined to use his best endeavours to finally crush the enemy in his present position, so as to do away with the danger of their gaining possession of the side path which led into the heart of the island.

Directly in front of the battery, the ground sloped away down to the beach in a gentle declivity, and up this a winding road was cut by slight gradations which afforded a sufficiently easy approach. Still, so undisciplined were the troops of Alcibiades, that the Demarch thought, instead of marching along the road in a regular line, they would scramble confusedly upward either by the path or by the slope, so that his guns could play on their scattered ranks with deadly effect.

Maurice and his uncle took their field-glasses up to

the point of vantage above the side path, from whence they could survey the preparations of the enemy, who were now deploying in irregular lines under the amateur leadership of Alcibiades and the traitor Greek. Justinian laughed contemptuously as he saw the confusion into which Caliphronas was throwing his men, and, without removing the glass from his eyes, remarked on this bad generalship to Maurice.

‘I always thought Andros had a certain amount of brains, but, seeing what a mess he is making of things after all my training, I am wrong in believing him capable of anything except grinning in the mirror.’

‘Well, he has very bad soldiers, uncle. They seem to be ignorant of the simplest rules of discipline.’

‘And no wonder! The very scum of the Levant. Peasants, sailors, Turkish scamps, and stupid islanders. Still, even out of the most hopeless materials a good commander can form a disciplined corps, and I am sure they have had plenty of time to drill their men; but Andros has not the slightest capability for military matters. As for Alcibiades’—

The Demarch’s opinion of Alcibiades’ generalship was so bad that he could not find words sufficiently contemptuous to express his scorn; but as at this moment the enemy began to move irregularly

towards the road which led to the mouth of the pass, he shut up his glass and went down to his men, followed by Maurice.

‘The dance is about to begin,’ said Crispin, when the garrison were all in order at their several posts. ‘I expect it will be a merry one.’

‘Faith! we will be the pipers,’ replied Justinian grimly, pointing to his cannon; ‘they will caper gaily enough when these play the tune.’

‘We had better lose no time in beginning, then,’ said Maurice, who was looking at the approaching enemy, ‘for here come the dancers.’

As Justinian had foreseen, the stormers, instead of advancing by the road in a compact body, and thus neutralising the danger of the opening fire, rushed irregularly up the slope in hopeless confusion, yelling wildly in order to keep up their courage.

‘Scum!’ cried Justinian scornfully, as he saw the motley crowd climbing upward. ‘Give it ’em, lads!’

Dick presided over one of the guns, Gurt at the other, as both of them, having been in the English navy, knew all the necessary business for loading, adjusting the sight, and firing the cannon. The Demarch’s finances had not run to the expense of importing cannon of the new type, so these brass

guns were somewhat old-fashioned ; still, loaded with grape-shot, they were very effective when fired, especially when sighted with considerable science by the old man-of-war's men.

Up came the enemy, shrieking like fiends, and broken into irregular bands, dotting the green slope with patches of blue topped by the red of their Turkish headgear. Dick, who was to fire first, waited till they were within an easy distance, and then put the lighted fuse to the touch-hole of his cannon. There was a roar as the deadly grape-shot splashed among the advancing crowd, and then a shriek of rage as the column reeled, wavered, and for the moment paused. Encouraged by Alcibiades, they still advanced, only to be mown down by the dozen with the discharge of Gurt's cannon, upon which, dismayed at the carnage, they retreated down the hill in confusion, leaving the ground thick with the slain.

On seeing this, the sailors set up a hearty British cheer, in which all joined but Justinian, who smiled grimly at the effective work done by his guns. Alcibiades was stamping with rage, for his little scheme of firing the barricade, as on the previous occasion, was quite impracticable, owing to those deadly muzzles which gaped through the palisade.

With considerable caution, however, he scattered his men so as to avert the danger of huddled masses being cut down by the grape-shot, and kept up a continuous fire at the frowning front of the battery. The Melnosians returned the fire with their Martini-Henry rifles, and managed to pick off a few of the sharp-shooters, while, protected by their gabions, they managed to escape without the loss of a single man ; for the bullets either buried themselves with a dull thud in the sand-bags, or else went ripping above their heads to flatten themselves harmlessly against the lava walls of the pass.

‘They can’t last long against our cannon, uncle,’ said Maurice, who was watching Dick reloading his gun ; ‘that first dash has lost them nearly twenty men.’

‘It will take some time to polish off two hundred,’ replied Justinian, who had his glass to his eyes ; ‘besides, Alcibiades has some scheme in his head. All this sharp-shooting is done to divert our attention. I thought so!’

‘What’s up now?’

‘He’s bringing up a field-piece to that hill.’

‘The deuce!’ cried Maurice, hastily focussing his glasses. ‘We must silence that. Dick, do you think you could bring one of the guns to bear on that hill to the right?’

Dick, after some consideration, thought he could, and did ; for, with the assistance of his sailors, he wheeled round the gun-carriage to an angle of thirty-five degrees, so as to bring the muzzle of his piece in a direct line with the conical-shaped mound up which the enemy were dragging their battery. This hill, which was slightly to the right of the pass, would have been utilised long before for his guns by any able commander ; but not until the loss of twenty men had taught Alcibiades experience, did he think of making use of the position. The crest of the mound was slightly lower than the palisade ; but, by depressing the muzzle of his gun, Dick got a fair opportunity of disabling the battery of the enemy. Owing to their numbers, they soon succeeded in dragging the field-piece up to the top, and, placing it in position, raised the mouth slightly, so as to aim at the upper part of the barricade. Just as they were preparing to fire, Dick, who had loaded with round shot, discharged his cannon, and the great mass of iron went hurtling viciously through the air.

‘Badly aimed, Dick,’ said Maurice, who had his glasses up. ‘Your eye is not quite in. Look out, they are returning the compliment.’

There was a puff of smoke, a sudden flash, an



infinitesimal pause, and a ball came ripping along at tremendous speed, only to strike the ground in front of the battery, and ricochet harmlessly down the hill.

‘Their gunner isn’t much better than myself, sir,’ cried Dick, carefully training the sight of his piece; ‘but I won’t miss this time.’

His aim was much better, for the second shot, while not touching the cannon, knocked over two men standing near, who dropped down quickly over the brow of the hill.

‘Egad! I wish those two had been the leaders,’ said Justinian cheerfully; ‘both the scamps are there. Here’s the return fire.’

This time the ball struck the palisade fair in the top centre, and smashed down several of the cross-beams. The sharp-shooters, seeing this, gave a cry of triumph, which was echoed by those on the hill, and the gunner rapidly loaded again, so as to follow up the advantage gained. Dick, however, was already prepared, and before the cannon of the enemy could be fired again, a shot from his gun struck it on the carriage, causing it to fall out of position. The besiegers set at once to work about restoring it to its former level; but by this time Gurt also had directed his gun towards the battery, and shot after shot from

the two cannon followed so rapidly that in a short time the enemy had to vacate their position.

‘I wish I could make a dash, and spike that gun,’ said Maurice, as the Melnosians cheered loudly.

‘You’ll do nothing of the sort, sir,’ replied Justinian sharply. ‘I don’t want to run the chance of losing you again. Besides, Alcibiades is going to make a dash for the gate.’

‘Old fool!’ said Crispin scornfully. ‘He can’t bring his men up against our guns.’

‘He’s going to try, at all events, as he evidently thinks his shot has told heavily on our defences.’

All this time there was a constant flash, flash, flash along the line of sharp-shooters, as they kept up a continuous fire; and, in spite of all precautions, two Melnosians were killed. Under cover of this musketry it was apparent that Alcibiades was about to make a dash; but, having learned a lesson from the previous advance, he led his men along the right side, close under the cliffs, where the cannon could not reach them. Justinian saw this manœuvre, and, rapidly serving out fresh ammunition, told his men to be in readiness.

Round the right corner of the battery came a furious crowd, headed by a huge negro, for Alcibiades

had no liking for heading such a forlorn hope. The attack was received by the garrison with a volley from their muskets; but, in spite of many dropping off dead and wounded, the besiegers still continued to struggle fiercely up the outward beams, in order to reach the upper gap made by the cannon. The sharp-shooters had, of course, to cease fire, lest they should hit their comrades; and, seeing that they had swarmed up nearly to the top of the barrier, ran forward to help them. The Melnosians, in two lines, one kneeling, the other standing at the back, fired continuously at the writhing mass, while those behind the gabions stabbed with bayonet and cutlass with right goodwill. Both cannon were discharged, cutting two lanes of blood through the furious throng; yet, notwithstanding their losses, the stormers still stuck to their intention, and it became evident that nothing now remained to the garrison but to beat them back in a hand-to-hand fight.

One pirate leaped from the parapet through the gap, but was speedily despatched by a bayonet-thrust in the chest. Others, however, followed like a flock of sheep, and there was little doubt but that the Melnosians would have been driven back had they not been so expert in the use of the bayonet.

Justinian, an old army man, had taught them the exercise splendidly, and, raising the bayonets first high, and then back over the right shoulder, their weapons told in every thrust; so they were thus enabled to keep the foe at bay.

While the top of the barrier was thus being assaulted, a number of men, under Caliphronas, were hacking away at the lower beams; for, unwilling to harm his men, Alcibiades refrained from setting fire to the palisade as he had done before. The weight of the stormers on the top made the now weakened lower portion rock ominously, and it was evident the whole structure would soon be in ruins. When this happened, the danger would be imminent, as Justinian knew that the enemy far exceeded in numbers his own little band, and, even with the advantage of the narrow gorge, it was doubtful if he could hold his ground. Giving way, however, meant that the side path would be left to Alcibiades, and, however bravely defended, would be certain to be captured at once. Besides, he dared not leave the guns in possession of the enemy, as they would at once use them with deadly effect against his own men.

Rendered reckless by despair, the Melnosians fought like demons against the enemy, and, though Alcibiades

hurled body after body of men against them, they stood their ground, and did not give way one inch. At any moment, however, the barrier might fall, and Justinian lost no time in rendering the guns innocuous, if he were forced to retreat up the gorge.

‘Dick! Gurt! spike the guns! spike the guns!’ he roared in English, and the Greeks, not understanding the language, did not guess how important was the order. Caliphronas, however, heard it on the other side of the barrier, and made immediate report to Alcibiades, who grasped the idea at once.

‘Make for the guns! capture the guns!’ he yelled in Greek; ‘they will spike them!’

A body of men leaped down from the parapet and made for the gun held by Dick, but Maurice sprang in front of it, and, while the bos’n was busy putting in the spike, kept the enemy at bay. He soon emptied his revolver, and thus had to fight solely with the sword, but the Demarch, seeing his danger, reinforced him with four Melnosians, who speedily beat back the assailants. However, Dick’s task was accomplished, and, Gurt having also obeyed orders, both guns were now spiked and perfectly useless, should the enemy gain possession of them. The only danger remaining was the side path, which,

notwithstanding its iron door, might be forced ; so the Demarch and his men staunchly held their ground, in spite of the havoc which was being made in their ranks by the overwhelming force of the enemy.

Fighting fiercely, with obstinate determination not to give way one inch, slowly but surely the Melnosians drove back the stormers to the barrier, clambering up over the heaps of slain in their efforts to force the enemy to vacate their position. The air was blinding with gunpowder smoke ; the clash of the swords, the fierce shouts of the besiegers, and the cheers of the Melnosians created a most infernal din ; but high above this was heard the crash of the palisade, as, yielding to the axes of the enemy, it fell outward. Many were unable to retreat in time, owing to the pressure behind,—for Alcibiades had long ago given up every attempt to keep order,—and in its fall a great number were crushed to death, while their comrades, not heeding their death agonies, rushed forward across the platform thus formed, in order to follow up their advantage as speedily as possible.

At this critical juncture Justinian bethought himself of the stratagem of scaring the enemy by a fictitious force, which had completely turned the scale at some French battle, and hastily bade Temis-

tocles to run to the Acropolis and tell all the women to come down the gorge with drums beating and colours flying. There were plenty of kettledrums and flags at the Acropolis, which Justinian had not cared to use, so these, used by the women advancing down the pass, might inspire the enemy with fear that reinforcements had arrived. The only proviso that Justinian made was that the women, on their arrival, should keep out of musket-shot and not risk their lives.

Themistocles sped away like a deer, and Justinian hastily advanced to the front, in order to assist Maurice and Crispin, who were both fighting with the desperation of despair. The Melnosians, two deep, extended right across the gorge, and, being at close quarters, were using their bayonets for stabbing, and their clubbed muskets for dealing blows. The sailors were almost in a ring round Maurice and Crispin, slashing away vigorously with their cutlasses, cutting principally at the faces and necks of their assailants, so as not to transfix their blades in the bodies, and thus render themselves defenceless.

Maurice, whose stature gave him considerable advantage over his opponents, was sweeping his sword as rapidly as possible among the enemy, cutting,

thrusting, slashing, and stabbing ; but he was much encumbered by one of the wounded enemy, who was clutching his leg, and thus impeding his movements. Justinian saw this, and, firing at the wretch, knocked his brains out ; while Maurice, thus freed, sprang resolutely forward, followed by his sailors, in order to get at Alcibiades, who was urging on his men to the attack from the vantage-ground of the fallen palisade. Justinian and Crispin, thus left alone in front of their line, fought vigorously to keep back the enemy, while the old Demarch, seeing his nephew's aim, shouted out words of encouragement.

‘Cut off the head and the body will follow!’ he cried in English, then rapidly added in Greek, ‘Close up, men ! close up ! give them no chance of getting to the rear.’

In obedience to this command, as soon as a man in the front rank fell, another stepped in from the rear to fill up a gap, or else the foremost soldiers closed up shoulder to shoulder so as to preserve an unbroken front. By this means they kept the enemy at bay, and, notwithstanding the fierceness of the fight, held their ground staunchly, waiting the signal to advance. Between them and the fallen palisade was a furious crowd heaving like a stormy sea, and



at the back Alcibiades giving his orders, which, however, were not heeded. Justinian was waiting until Maurice killed Alcibiades, when he determined to advance with all his force, and thus drive the disheartened enemy over the verge of the barrier.

It was with some difficulty that Maurice managed to fight his way through the crowd, but, protected in the rear by Dick and his sailors, he at length managed to get clear, and, leaping on the parapet, confronted Alcibiades, bare-headed, but waving his sword with a stern resolve to kill the pirate. Alcibiades was no coward, but had kept in the background, as he deemed his life too valuable to risk, as indeed it was, for lacking a head the invading army would be worse than useless. Face to face with the Englishman, however, he did not shirk the combat, but, whirling his sword with a fierce cry, dashed boldly at his enemy. He could not call upon his followers to aid him, as the sailors with their cutlasses kept a clear ring for the combat; so he saw plainly it was a duel to the death, and one upon which depended the whole issue of the battle. Alcibiades' wound was only a slight one, and did not neutralize his fighting powers, therefore Maurice was taking no unfair advantage in thus challenging him to a hand to hand combat.

Not having the reach of arm or the stature of the Englishman, he found himself at considerable disadvantage, but nevertheless fought on bravely, and, adopting stabbing tactics more than slashing, tried his best to give his opponent a mortal wound. Maurice, however, having a quick eye, was enabled to ward off his blows by a dexterous use of his now emptied revolver, and made rapid play with his sword firmly grasped in his right hand. The pirate captain managed to wound him in the left arm just below the elbow, but at that moment Maurice passed his sword through his chest. Alcibiades, though not fatally wounded, gasped out 'Christos!' and fell back over the palisade into the outward mass of his men, who would have carried him off, but Justinian, hearing the distant roll of a drum, and seeing that Maurice was alone on the parapet, gave the order to advance.

On observing his uncle's action, Maurice cried out in Greek, 'Alcibiades is dead!' whereupon the intervening enemy were filled with alarm, and began to retreat before the advancing Melnosians. Dick, the sailors, and Maurice leaped down to take Alcibiades prisoner, and, while busily engaged in fighting, the whole inward crowd, driven forward, came rolling

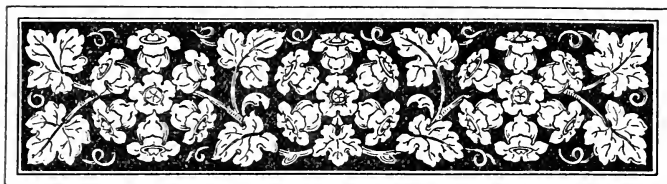
pell-mell over the fallen barrier, carrying those who would have fain stayed with them. Maurice had enough to do to keep his feet against the torrent, but managed to divide it into two streams with the use of his sword and the aid of his sailors.

In another moment Justinian and Crispin were by his side, and down the slope fled the foe in headlong confusion, with the Melnosians in full chase.

‘Keep together, men! keep together!’ yelled the Demarch, as he raced down the slope like a school-boy; but the Melnosians had been too long held back to pay any attention to his orders. Right and left fled the enemy, making for the boats, but Gurt, seeing this, tried to intercept them with a few sailors. Unfortunately he could not run, owing to his wound, so had to abandon the pursuit, and the foremost fugitives managed to get afloat. Justinian had forbidden all useless killing, but his islanders, frenzied at the loss of their comrades, and elated by their victory, were quite beyond control. Those who could not reach the boats were slaughtered on the spot, and the Demarch, in despair of saving the lives of any, could do nothing but stand on the beach with Maurice and Crispin beside him. A goodly number of the fugitives, however, were now pulling

for the open sea, among them Caliphronas, who, standing up in the boat, shook his two hands with despair on beholding the rout. In a short space of time, what with the fierceness of the Melnosians, who gave no quarter, and the flight of the fugitives, there remained not a single enemy on the island, except the wounded men who had been unable to fly.

There was a roll of many drums, a shrill cry of delight, and, turning their faces landward, the three men saw Helena, with a company of women, standing on the ruins of the palisade. The setting sun illumined the group, and, grasping the staff whence floated the victorious folds of the Union Jack, she seemed to be the Goddess of Victory come down to sanctify with her presence the triumph of the Melnosians. Her women behind her, the blackened ruins of the barrier beneath her feet, and the Englishmen below on the beach, she lifted up the staff proudly, and the great flag flung out its mighty folds to the breeze, as if it too rejoiced in the triumph of success. The three Englishmen's hearts thrilled with patriotic pride as they saw the symbol of victory flaunting in the wind, and the British sailors, uncovering their heads, saluted the invincible flag with three ringing cheers.



## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A COUNCIL OF WAR.

*The snake is scotched, but is not dead,*

*Beware! the snare!*

*Soon will it lift again its head,*

*Beware! nor dare!*

*The fangs contain their poison still,*

*The wounded creature yet may kill,*

*Beware! take care!*

*With cautious speech, good council take,*

*Beware! the snare!*

*Nor trust the seeming lifeless snake,*

*Beware! nor dare!*

*For unexpected it may spring,*

*And slay thee with its venom'd sting,*

*Beware! take care!*



HE immediate danger was over, but Justinian was by no means inclined to think that, even with the death of Alcibiades, the island would be left in peace, particularly as Caliphronas was still alive. That the foiled Greek would tamely submit to be beaten thus, was out of the

question, and the Demarch was quite certain that he would again gather an army to assault Melnos. If such an event took place, matters would become very serious, as, notwithstanding their loss was less than that of the enemy, scarcely fifty Melnosians survived, and many of these were severely hurt. Four sailors had also been killed, so the total of able men left to defend the island, making allowance for those incapable through wounds, amounted to scarcely forty souls, or thereabouts. Even with the carnage which had ensued during the battle, Justinian felt sure that nearly a hundred men had escaped in boats, and, as Caliphronas must know that the garrison was considerably weakened by loss of men, the Demarch feared lest he should return almost immediately with added numbers and risk another battle, in which case it seemed impossible for the Melnosians to escape total extermination.

This belief was confirmed in a strange way on his return to the palisade, for Alcibiades was found under a heap of corpses, apparently lifeless, and though for a short time he was revived with brandy, had died immediately afterwards, assuring Justinian that reinforcements were on their way to avenge his death. Whether this was mere bravado or not,

Justinian was not quite sure, yet, in spite of his intimate knowledge of the dead smuggler's rascality, he hardly thought even such a scamp would die with a deliberate falsehood on his lips, therefore at once hastened to rebuild the barrier, in case of invasion by possible foes. Some of the women went back to the village for provisions, while others remained behind to look after the wounded. There was no time to bury the dead, present safety being the great question of the hour, so the bodies of friend and foe were laid gently down on the beach under the cliffs, to be buried as soon as possible, when all danger was past. The gorge thus being cleared of the slain, Justinian made his men sit down to refresh themselves with wine and food, after which, wearied as they were, all hands went bravely forward to rebuild the barrier. Even the women helped in this important task, and by ten o'clock in the evening, a goodly portion of the desired barricade was erected.

As soon as he heard about the approaching reinforcements from the dying Alcibiades, the Demarch foresaw that, to be prepared for such an emergency as a fresh attack, his men would have to work all night, therefore desired Alexandros to bring down the

electric light, so as to permit the toil to be carried on continuously until the battery was finished. This was easily done, by the electrician joining other wires on to those already at the head of the pass, and then fixing the apparatus near the outer entrance. So speedily did he perform this difficult task, that in a few hours all was in order, and the powerful rays flooded not only the immediate neighbourhood of the works, but even the beach and a portion of the harbour inside the breakwater.

Helena had obstinately refused to go back to the Acropolis, and, as the other women remained to help, her father did not insist on her return, so she attended to Maurice's wound, which, after all, was a mere scratch. In common with the rest, she also took her turn at nursing, and aided to carry the wounded into the interior of the island, for so busy were the men at the repairing of the barrier, that none could be spared, so the women, proving themselves thorough heroines, took all the hospital work on their shoulders.

'I wonder, in your scheme, you did not include a doctor, uncle,' said Maurice, as he stood by the Demarch, superintending the rebuilding of the palisade. 'A medical man would have come in handy now.'



‘That is true! Had Crispin not left me as he did, I would have sent him to study medicine, but, as it is, I put off the affair from time to time, and now, when I most need one, I find myself without a surgeon.’

‘I could never have been a surgeon, Justinian,’ said Crispin with a shudder; ‘cutting up people would make me feel quite ill.’

‘You cut up a good many to-day without being much disturbed,’ said the Demarch with a laugh; ‘but, of course, I know that was in hot blood. However, it is no use longing for the impossible, so it is to be hoped my Melnosians will recover without the aid of medical science.’

‘Is your wound hurting you, Maurice?’ asked Helena, who, though tender-hearted as a rule, seemed on this occasion to think solely of her lover, despite the fact that so many men had been killed.

‘Pooh! not a bit—a mere scratch!’

‘You’ve got to thank my amber heart for your safety.’

‘Or your golden hair,’ he retorted smiling; ‘but, in faith, Helena, I fancy my good luck has had most to do with my safety.’

‘Don’t undervalue your fighting powers, Maurice,’

said the Demarch, who overheard this remark ; ‘ your tussle with Alcibiades was no light one.’

‘ Well, I certainly got the better of him, but his wound was only a trifle, and, had he not tumbled over the parapet, the fight would have lasted much longer. As it was, the poor devil was really trampled to death during the retreat of the enemy. Still, if you like, Helena, we will put it all down to your amber heart.’

‘ What amber heart are you talking about ? ’ asked Justinian inquiringly.

‘ Ah, that is a secret between Helena and myself,’ said Maurice with a meaning look at the blushing girl,—‘ a very charming secret indeed. Well, Gurt, and how do you find yourself ? ’

The sailor, who had been working outside the palisade, gave his trousers a hitch and pulled his forelock.

‘ I’m as right as a trivet, sir. I hop a little with that there dig I got yesterday, but Lor’ bless you, sir ! ’tain’t nothin’. But if I may make so bold, Mr. Justinian, I wants to speak, sir.’

‘ What is it, Gurt ? ’

‘ Growin’ tired of bricklayin’, sir, I goes down a bit for a breath of air, and there, sir, as I’m a sinner, I hears the dip of oars.’

‘Boats coming!’ cried the Demarch and Maurice in one breath.

‘Yes, sir. I jest came up like a shot. Turn on the light, sir, t’ th’ north, an’ if you don’t see them lubbers comin’ back, I’m a Dutchman!’

Maurice ran off to tell Alexandros, who at once sent the white glare across the sea, and there, pulling straight for the breakwater, they saw a long string of boats. The men therein guessed by the sudden flash of the light that they were discovered, and gave a yell of anger, for they had hoped to pull in under cover of darkness, and take the Melnosians by surprise. Thanks, however, to Gurt’s quick ear, and the serviceable electric light, their little scheme was frustrated at nearly the moment of its fulfilment.

‘Ten boats!’ cried Justinian, counting them rapidly. ‘Push on the work, my men. Here, some of you, take up your guns. What about those cannon, Dick?’

‘All right now, sir,’ said the sailor, saluting; ‘got the spikes out.’

‘See if you can knock a few of those boats to splinters. Helena, you and the women go back to the Acropolis.’

‘Oh no, no, father! let me remain here. And see! all the women are helping to build the wall.’

‘Well, well, we need all hands; but, for God’s sake, my child, keep in a place of safety!’

‘Do you think they will attack to-night?’ asked Crispin, who had raced full speed down the gorge, and was out of breath.

‘No. In the first place, they have had a good thrashing to-day, and in the second, Caliphronas is too much of a coward to lead them on until he has recovered his nerve. They’ve got reinforcements, however. I expect those flying met the new men coming, and now they’ve all returned in a body. Is that gun ready, Dick?’

‘In a minute, sir. Jest turn the light on the water so as I can train the gun.’

Alexandros did so, and Dick carefully sighted the piece, so as to allow for the way the boats were making through the water. Evidently unaware of their danger, instead of keeping widely apart, and thus neutralizing the chance of the shot hitting them, they all made for the beach in a dense bunch. The electric light showed their position as clearly as if it were day, and the round shot went with a roar right into the conglomerate mass, doing considerable

damage. The advancing Greeks yelled with fear, but, seeing their only chance of safety was to get under the level of the guns, pulled in like madmen to the beach. Then by the white radiance of the light, it was seen that two boats had been sunk, and many of their occupants killed, but the survivors, fish in the water, like all insular Greeks, were swimming rapidly to land.

Caliphronas, foolish though he was in military matters, yet knew sufficient of the formation of the ground and the nature of cannon to be aware that it was impossible the muzzles of the guns could be depressed sufficiently to do damage to his men on the beach, therefore, feeling themselves comparatively safe, the newly-landed pirates hastened to put up tents, evidently intending to rest that night and continue the assault in the morning. Knowing that the little garrison must be worn out with the long fight during the day, they did not trouble themselves in any way to guard against an attack, not even placing sentries at the outposts.

As all their movements were revealed by the glare of the search light, Justinian noted this fact, and regretted bitterly that he had not a sufficient force at his command to sally forth against this ill-guarded camp.

‘Egad, Maurice!’ he said in vexation; ‘with fifty men at our backs we could sweep them off the island before dawn. The rascals evidently know how weak we are in numbers, else they would not be so careless of their camp. How is that work going on?’

‘Nearly finished, sir,’ reported Dick, who was overseer. ‘They won’t get over that wall in a hurry, I’ll bet.’

‘Transfer your command to one of your men and come here; I wish to hold a council of war.’

Dick saluted, and, having instructed one of his messmates to attend to the final details of the parapet, came forward as Justinian desired. Helena, in company with some of the women, had gone up the gorge, in order to attend to the wounded, so the five men, for Gurt was also included in the council, sat down on the grass some little distance away from the workers, and began to discuss the situation in low tones. Sentries had been posted at the barrier, and the electric light was full on the camp of the enemy, so in the event of any movement being made for an assault, which was not likely, Justinian knew he would be informed at once. After all, with the barrier, the heavy guns, and their muskets, they could hope to hold the pass for some time, but in the end

it was doubtful if they would not have to give in, which catastrophe would mean death to every soul on the island.

‘You can see for yourselves, gentlemen, that the danger is very grave,’ said the Demarch anxiously; ‘we are only forty in number, and with these reinforcements the enemy must be at least one hundred and fifty. It took us all our time to beat them off to-day when we were stronger and not fatigued, but to-morrow, with such a small force, all worn out with fighting and want of sleep, I dread the worst.’

‘There is one thing in our favour,’ observed Maurice in a satisfied tone; ‘bad leader as Alcibiades was, he had more pluck than Caliphronas; and, as he is the general now, he will not inspire his men with confidence. However brave the followers are, unless the leader is equally so, their valour is not of much use, as it lacks discipline and trust in the general.’

‘There’s one thing, sir,’ remarked Dick, addressing Justinian,—‘there is one thing I’d like to say. All these Greeks have bare feet, so I think it ’ud be a good plan to strew the front of the palisade with broken glass, which would cut them up a bit.’

‘That’s a good idea, Dick; and then, when they are in confusion, we can do some damage with our cannon. By the way, what about their gun? we should have brought that in.’

‘It’s a pity we didn’t, sir; but it ain’t much good to them, for I’ve spiked it proper.’

‘You’ve got dynamite, Justinian, have you not?’ said Crispin, who had been thinking.

‘Yes; plenty.’

‘Then why not make a mine on the slope of the hill, and blow it up with electricity when the enemy are coming up?’

‘Egad! I’ll do that at once. The dynamite can be brought down in about half an hour; it won’t take long to dig a trench and lay a wire: so we ought to have the whole thing ready by the time they assault the battery at dawn. Dick, take Temistocles and some other men up to the magazine.’

Dick went off to obey this order with alacrity; and Justinian, whose spirits were rising at the feasibility of these schemes to conquer his enemies, went on talking hopefully of the future.

‘What with cannon, dynamite, and broken bottles to cut their bare feet, I fancy those scoundrels will get a warm reception. Ah, if I only had the full



strength of my Melnosians again, I would soon drive these scoundrels back to the ocean !’

‘If we smash them up to-morrow with dynamite, they won’t come again, uncle.’

‘I trust not ; but Alcibiades seems to have made extensive preparations in the way of reinforcements, and, for all I know, a fresh batch may arrive to-morrow ; while at every assault our numbers diminish. If we only could get more men ! but I fear that is impossible.’

‘Not so impossible as you think,’ said Crispin deliberately. ‘Suppose I go to Syra, and get the Eparch there to send you reinforcements?’

‘True ; he’s a friend of mine ; and if he did not send regular soldiers, he could at least let me have some men of the same fighting powers as these scoundrels. But how are you to get to Syra ? and how are you going to bring the troops back?’

‘As to bringing them back, by this time my yacht must be there, so it would not take long for me to steam here with a good number of men.’

‘Well, but you can’t go. We are beleaguered.’

‘All the enemy are asleep ; so if Gurt here, who knows these waters thoroughly, will come with me, I think we could steal down to the breakwater and

obtain one of their boats. A good breeze is blowing ; so, if we put up the sail, we could soon cut across the course of one of those Cretan steamers which sail to Syra from Khanea, in which case it would take but a little time to reach the yacht. Once at Syra, I would get as many men as possible, and come back at once.'

'It is a wild scheme, but not impossible,' said Justinian thoughtfully. 'You'd have to sail about thirty miles ; and then there is the chance of your getting picked up by a steamer.'

'With this 'ere breeze, sir,' remarked Gurt, who was not averse to the adventure, 'I guess we'd get in the track of one of them Cretans in about twelve hours, more or less. Once in the line, and there's lots of 'em plying to and fro, so the chances are we'd soon be picked up. I'm game for it, if Mr. Crispin is, sir.'

'But are you not too tired ?'

'I am not,' said the poet, stretching himself ; 'besides, anything is better than this suspense. The only thing I'm afraid of is Gurt's wound.'

'Don't you be afeared o' that, sir,' replied Gurt bluntly. 'I've lost some blood, but 'tain't nothing. I ain't no babby to squeak fur nothin'. If we kin git a boat, I'm ready to start this minit.'

‘What do you say, Maurice?’

Roylands had been listening to these propositions not without a certain amount of approval, which was, however, mingled with a feeling that such a scheme was somewhat foolhardy.

‘I hardly know what to say,’ he observed at length. ‘There is one thing certain, if we wish to hold the island, we must have more men; and, so far as I can see, Crispin’s scheme is the only way of getting them. The mere sight of the yacht filled with troops would frighten the life out of these scoundrels, and cause them to clear out; but the difficulty is how to get a boat without being seen by the enemy.’

‘I think we can manage that,’ said Justinian, indicating points with his finger; for, of course, with the electric light, there was no difficulty in following his actions. ‘You see, the camp of the enemy is here, to the left of the harbour. I noticed that several of the larger boats were tied up to the breakwater; so if Crispin and Gurt get down there, and walk along the breakwater itself, they can loosen one of the boats and tow it outward to the mouth of the harbour. There they can get in, and row off to the west, without any chance of the dip of their oars being heard by the enemy.’

‘That is all very well, uncle; but how are they to get down to the beach? No doubt the enemy are all asleep, and, as we know, have not posted sentries; still, if Crispin goes out by the palisade, he might be seen, in spite of all precautions. Caliphronas is sure to be on the alert.’

‘I expect Caliphronas is too weary with his day’s work to keep awake,’ replied the Demarch drily; ‘and he is not the man to deny himself rest, let the consequences be what they may. However, if you don’t object to a little danger, Crispin, I think we can get you out by another way.’

‘In any case there is danger, so a little more makes no difference.’

‘Then we will go up to the point above the side path; and, from there, you know, the cliff slopes down sheer two hundred feet. We can let you and Gurt down there by ropes, and you can steal along in the darkness down to the breakwater. Once there, and the rest will be easy.’

‘It’s a risk.’

‘Certainly; the whole enterprise is risky; but we will keep the electric light full on the camp, so, while you can see all the movements of the enemy, they can see nothing of you in the darkness. To

tell you the truth, however, they have such a belief that we can do nothing, that they are all sound asleep; so I don't think you will run much risk. Well, what do you say?'

'I'll do it.'

'So will I, sir.'

'Good! We will trust to Providence for the rest. Let me see, Crispin. It is now past midnight; so, if you can catch one of those steamers before to-morrow night, you will be in Syra by the next day. In twenty-four hours, I have no doubt, the Eparch will give you plenty of men; and it will not take a very long time for a steamer to reach here. Altogether, if all goes well, you ought to be back in four or five days. The question is, can we hold the island till then?'

'We must!' said Maurice decisively. 'If the worst comes to the worst, we can blast those overhanging rocks yonder with dynamite, and thus close up the pass entirely. True, we will shut ourselves up as in a prison; still, we will be safe until aid arrives; for, once the gorge is closed up, no enemy can possibly get into the interior without almost superhuman exertions.'

'We must hope for the best,' answered Justinian,

rising to his feet. 'Well, Crispin, I thank you for your offer, and will accept it. When will you start?'

'At once. There is nothing to be gained by waiting. We will take enough of these provisions to last us for three days, in case we miss the steamer; and, for the rest, trust to Providence.'

'There is a good deal of trusting in Providence about the whole scheme,' said Justinian with a sigh. 'You may run the gauntlet to the breakwater successfully, you may get safely off in a boat without being seen by the enemy, you may be picked up by a Cretan steamer, and you may find your yacht lying at Syra. It's all chance, my boy; and really I think it would be better for us to adopt Maurice's plan in closing up the pass, so that the enemy can't possibly get in.'

'And we can't possibly get out,' replied Crispin significantly; 'it is too dangerous. Remember our conversation the other day about the volcano: if you blow up the pass, all means of exit will be cut off; and, should the crater burst out, no one of us would be left alive.'

'Then go, and God speed you!' cried the Demarch, who saw plainly that it was a case of Scylla and Charybdis.

Maurice had not heard this conversation about the volcano, much to his uncle's satisfaction, having gone forward to meet Dick, who had just come back from the magazine with the dynamite. The bos'n expressed great satisfaction when he heard of the proposed scheme, and would dearly liked to have gone himself in place of Gurt, only he knew Justinian could not spare him. However, he was well aware that Crispin could not have a better companion than Gurt, for the old sailor was well acquainted with the course they would have to take towards the west; and, moreover, having had something to do with the line of steamers between Khanea and Syra, knew better than any one as to the possibility of being picked up by one of them without loss of time.

The scheme was put into working order at once, and a sufficiency of provisions were made ready for the adventurers. Crispin filled his brandy-flask and took his revolver, in case he might be stopped on the beach by the enemy; and both he and Gurt took heavy woollen cloaks to protect them from the chill sea-breeze. It was agreed that Justinian and Maurice only should go up with the rope to let down their companions to the beach below, as it was necessary for Dick to remain, in order to attend

to the dynamite mine. Nothing was told to the Melnosians about the proposed scheme, lest they, seeing how desperate affairs were, should lose heart; and, beyond the four leaders, Gurt, and Helena, every one was in ignorance of the daring attempt about to be made.

After Helena, who was deeply affected by Crispin's bravery, had said good-bye to him and Gurt, she went back to the Acropolis with a number of women to obtain some rest, having arranged with her father to come down at early morning with plenty of broken glass, in order to protect the front of the palisade. Dick and his men were already hard at work just on the brow of the slope, about one hundred yards away, digging the mine for the dynamite; so, all things going on thus fairly well, and there being no sign of movement in the camp of the enemy, the Demarch, with his nephew and the two adventurers, unlocked the iron gate, in order to ascend to the top of the cliff, from whence Crispin and Gurt were to be lowered to the beach below.





## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE FORLORN HOPE.

*The night is dark,  
The cliff is high,  
No moon illumes  
The cloudy sky ;  
Below we mark  
The fearful glooms  
Which in their night  
Hide sombrely the way of flight.*

*To slender rope  
We cling with dread,  
And hanging there  
As by a thread,  
With fearful hope  
We downward fare,  
Till on the strand  
In safety for a time we land.*



FORTUNATELY for the success of the enterprise, the sky was cloudy, so that the moon, thickly veiled by vapours, was unable to betray the adventurers by her tell-tale light. A strong breeze was blowing seaward from the land

and ruffling the surface of the black water to ragged caps of white, which promised anything but a pleasant journey to Crispin and his companion.

They were warmly clothed in thick garments of blue dyed wool, consisting of tight-fitting jackets and loose trousers, tucked into high boots of untanned leather. In his belt Crispin carried a dagger and his revolver, while Gurt's cutlass dangled by his side, and both men also wore those red fishermen's caps common to the Ægean, with ample woollen capotes to protect them from the keen winds. Standing on the height of the lofty cliff, they could not see the beach for the profound gloom below, but to the left saw the camp of the enemy clearly defined in the fierce rays of the electric light. Everything there seemed to be as still as the grave, and the pirates were evidently sound asleep under canvas, for not a sound broke the stillness, save the whistle of the breeze and the sullen rolling of the waves on the sands below.

Maurice and the poet had brought up two coils of strong rope, each over a hundred feet in length; so, as the cliff but measured two hundred, there would be no difficulty about the ropes being too short. They tied these firmly together, then, making one end fast to a strong pine tree which grew some distance back

from the verge, flung the other over into the abyss below. The rope paid itself out rapidly, until, when only a few coils were left, it ceased running, which showed that it had touched bottom. Now the two adventurers prepared to descend, and shook hands with the Demarch and his nephew, both of whom were much affected. None of the four knew if they would meet again, for two were bound on a perilous voyage, and the others were beleaguered in a dangerous volcanic island by bloodthirsty enemies. If they reached the boat safely, and managed to push off into the open sea unseen by their enemies, they were to send up a rocket as a signal of success to the watchers on land. Gurt carried this useful article, and was the first to descend the slender rope, to which he clung like a spider to its thread, and dropped swiftly down until the thickening gloom hid him from their anxious eyes. After a time the rope slacked, and a gentle vibration stealing up it showed that Gurt had landed safely.

‘Good-bye, my dear lad,’ said Justinian, as he embraced the brave poet. ‘You are sure you have everything?’

‘My revolver, cartridges, cloak, a satchel filled with food, your letter to the Eparch. Yes, I think that is

all. Gurt has the water-bottles and the rocket. Good-bye, Maurice.'

'Good-bye, old fellow,' replied Maurice, and then they grasped each other's hand in token of farewell, with that stolid composure with which Englishmen in trying circumstances conceal their emotion. 'Take care of yourself for the sake of Eunice.'

'Certainly I will, and for yours also. If all goes well, you will see the white wings of *The Eunice* off this coast in a few days. But don't surrender the island before then.'

'Not much,' retorted Maurice grimly. 'I'll blow up all the rocks in the pass first, and if the enemy want to get in, they will have to fly over such a barrier. Good-bye once more, my boy. Over you go!'

Crispin, even at this supreme moment of parting, could not restrain a merry laugh at his friend's coolness, and, laying himself down on the brow of the cliff, grasped the rope, and prepared to descend. As soon as Gurt, below, felt from the quiver that his master was fairly on his way down, he pulled the rope taut with all his strength, so as to render the descent easier.

'Look out for the rocket,' cried Crispin, as he

dropped slowly downward into the blackness ; ‘and keep the light turned on the camp, so that we can see what those wretches are up to.’

‘All right,’ shouted Maurice, who, lying flat on his stomach, was peering over. ‘Good-bye.’

A faint farewell floated up through the intense gloom, as Crispin, with his hands tightly grasping the rope, and his legs twisted round it, went sliding down like a spider on his self-spun thread. Thanks to Gurt, who was holding out the cord widely from the rugged face of the cliff, he found no difficulty in descending, and soon landed safely beside the sailor on the damp sand.

Shaking the rope vigorously as a sign to those on top that they were now on *terra firma*, they walked carefully forward in the darkness towards the land end of the breakwater. Gradually their eyes, now relieved from the dazzle of the electric light, became accustomed to the gloom, and they could see to some extent a good distance ahead. Stealing along silently, their boots made no sound in the dead sand, and they arrived without mischance at the rocky wall of the harbour. Against this several boats were floating, tied to iron rings welded into the masonry, but rejecting the first three or four, which were too

cumbersome for two people to manage, they selected a small light carque, with masts, sail, and oars, which lay nearest to the sea.

Gurt pulled this in easily by the painter, and then bade Crispin get into it, so as to keep it off from the wall as it was towed along. As the sailor was the more powerful of the two, Crispin obeyed without hesitation, and, with the aid of an oar, kept the craft out from the masonry, while Gurt, with the rope over his shoulder and bent form, pulled it with some difficulty towards the entrance. All this time things had gone smoothly with them, for the electric light shone with a steady glare on the camp of their sleeping enemies, and they could see no movement to lead them to suspect that the pirates were aware of their daring attempt.

At the end of the breakwater they placed their provisions, water-bottles, and cloaks in the boat, and after making it fast to an iron ring, proceeded to let off the rocket in token of their success. Crispin placed it in position, applied the match, then hastily got into the boat with Gurt and pushed off to sea. Just as they were a few yards from the shore, the rocket flashed skyward with a sharp whiz, scattering trains of sparks in its ascent. Alarmed by the

unexpected sound, the pirates rushed out of their tents to ascertain the cause, but the rocket, having expended its fire, had fallen back into the water, so they could see nothing to account for the explosion.

After rowing out a little way, Gurt shipped the oars, and with the assistance of Crispin hoisted the sail, which, bellying out with a groan to the wind, made them glide rapidly forward. Then the sailor took the helm. Crispin, wrapped in his cloak, laid himself down to sleep for a few hours, and the little craft sped away lightly over the white-crested waves into the profound darkness. When they were out some considerable distance, the electric light suddenly flashed out a long ray into the sea, in token of farewell, then reverted to its original position, and the boat with its two brave occupants was swallowed up in the night.

On the cliff those left behind waited and watched until the welcome rocket shot its long trail of golden fire through the darkness, then both simultaneously heaved a sigh of relief.

‘Well, they are safe so far,’ said the Demarch thankfully; ‘but, by Jupiter, Maurice, those rascals have heard the rocket go!’

‘Oh, they’ve seen nothing,’ replied his nephew .

indifferently, as the few men who had rushed out retired again to their tents ; ' the fire died out before they caught even a glimpse of it. I'm glad Crispin is safely away ; his boat will be flying like a stormy petrel before this stiff breeze. Let us go down, uncle, and send them a farewell flash of the light.'

' But it might reveal the boat to those scamps,' said Justinian, as they rapidly descended the narrow staircase.

' Oh, they've all gone inside again ; besides, Crispin has got too much of a start by this time. I'll go and see Alexandros.'

Which he accordingly did, and the light, after flashing for a second on the flying boat, was again turned on the camp, after which Maurice and his uncle went to see how Dick and his dynamite mine were getting on. Without doubt, these amateur sappers had been working hard, for the trench was dug, the dynamite cartridges placed therein, and the whole filled up. Wires attached to each cartridge ran underground through the palisade to the interior of the battery, and none of the enemy would have suspected that the whole of that broad space in front was one deadly mine, which, when exploded, would blow them to pieces by the dozen.



‘There, sir,’ said Dick, wiping his heated brow; ‘now when Miss Helena, brings those bottles, we’ll smash ’em up on this ground between the mine and the palisade, so if any of those beggars escape being cut to pieces or blown to atoms it’ll be a miracle.’

‘It’s splendid, Dick,’ answered Justinian, clapping him on the shoulder. ‘And now, my lad, you had better go and have some rest.’

‘D’ye think it ’ull be safe, sir?’

‘Quite safe! All those scamps are sound asleep, and will not attack before dawn. The barrier is built up as strongly as we can do it, your cannon are all right, and, what with the mine and the broken glass, I think they’ll find it pretty hard to get even as far as they did to-day.’

‘Is Mr. Crispin all right, sir?’

‘Yes; he got safely into the boat, sent up a rocket to tell us of his success, and by this time is on his way to Syra for help.’

‘I saw the rocket, sir, so I guessed it ’ud be all right. D’ye think, sir, we’ll hold out till he brings the yacht here?’

‘Of course we will,’ said Maurice, who had joined the pair; ‘our defence here, even with our small

numbers, is quite strong enough to stand one storming. If some of them get their feet cut to pieces by the glass, and others blown up sky-high by the mine, I wouldn't be surprised if they gave up the attempt and sailed away.'

'Suppose they don't, sir?' questioned Dick dubiously.

'Then, my Richard, I have a plan for closing up this pass.'

'How, sir?'

'You see these overhanging rocks up there? Well, as they are just over the entrance of the pass, tomorrow, so soon as we've beaten back those wretches, we'll go up and bore holes along the narrowest part for dynamite cartridges. Then we'll attach wires as in the mine, and if we find that we can't stand against a second assault, all we have to do is to inveigle our friends under those rocks, explode the charge, and then, my Richard—oh, what a time they will have!'

'But that 'ull shut us up in the island, sir.'

'Well, what of that. It's a pleasant place to dwell in. But you needn't be afraid, Dick; it's easier to get out than get in, and when the yacht arrives we'll not have much difficulty in getting on board.'

‘Leave Melnos, sir!’

‘No!’ said Justinian angrily. ‘I’ve no doubt, if we are forced to fill up the pass, those scoundrels will leave us. If they don’t, the arrival of the yacht with fresh troops will drive them away. Then, we’ll go to work to open up both the pass and tunnel.’

‘Not enough men, Mr. Justinian.’

‘Ah, my poor Melnosians! Well, we’ll have to get more settlers, that’s all. The difficulty is not in getting men and women, but in getting pure-blooded Greeks.’

Dick did not understand this latter remark, so wisely left it unanswered, and, touching his cap, went off with his messmates to snatch a few hours’ sleep before the grand assault which all anticipated would take place at dawn. Justinian and his nephew made an inspection of all the defences, saw that the sentries were posted, and then went to talk to Alexandros about the small battery he was rigging up for the purpose of exploding the mine when necessary.

‘There will be no difficulty about this affair, Alexandros?’

‘No, Kyrios. I have attached the wires leading to the cartridges to this battery, and will have it under my charge to-morrow behind this rock, which will

protect me from the fire of the enemy. You wave your hand as a signal, and I touch this button, when the mine will explode in a second.'

'Excellent!' said Justinian, with great satisfaction. 'And if we wanted to close up the pass by bringing down those rocks above you?'

'In the same way, Kyrios. Make holes above for your cartridges and attach wires of any length. With my battery at one end of those wires, and the dynamite at the other, I could blow up the whole of this gorge from the Acropolis.'

'You can trust your man in charge of the engine?'

'Yes, Kyrios. That is all he has to do, for the dynamo works by itself without my being present.'

'All seems to be going smoothly,' said the Demarch to Maurice, as they turned away. 'That mine ought to do considerable damage.'

'I'm certain it will. But, uncle, you must be quite worn out for want of rest; so you go to sleep, and I will watch.'

'I will sleep later on; but meanwhile I am going up to the Acropolis to tell Helena that Crispin and Gurt have left the island safely. She will be very anxious.'

‘Give her a kiss for me,’ cried Maurice, as his uncle walked away up the pass.

‘I am afraid it will be horribly damaged on the transit,’ replied the Demarch smiling. ‘Good-bye, my lad. Keep a sharp look-out, and if anything goes wrong, send Temistocles to the Acropolis. I will be back in an hour.’

He went away slowly ; for, in spite of his iron spirit and determination to keep up, the incessant fatigue was beginning to tell on his frame. At seventy-five, one cannot play with the constitution ; and hardened as was the body of Justinian by temperate living and constant exercise, he nevertheless felt that he was not the man he was. Another thing which worried him mentally, and thus acted on him physically, was the thought of the volcano ; for, in spite of the way in which he reassured Crispin, he felt by no means easy in his mind regarding the safety of the island. Not until he was absolutely forced to, would he close up the pass, and thus shut himself up in a crater apparently on the verge of eruption. True, if the worst came, he could escape with his people over the cliff, but such a method would take some time ; and, with the volcano spouting fire, there would be but a small chance of any one escaping alive. Full of these thoughts, he

walked leisurely along, pondering over matters volcanic and matters military ; for with the treacherous crater on one side, and the cruel enemy on the other, he could not but see that matters were approaching a crisis.

Even if the volcano remained quiescent, and the enemy were beaten back, still things were in anything but a satisfactory position ; for he had lost many of his men, and he knew how difficult it would be to supply their places with Greeks of the old Hellenic stock. Those who were dead had been trained up under his eye ; they knew his aims and aspirations, and were already developing greatly : but now all that was at an end ; they had been cut off by death, and even if he got new blood, it would mean that the whole task of training up a new generation would have to begin all over again. Justinian was a man of great self-control, but when he thought of all he had lost, in the darkness of night he gave free vent to his emotion, and wept bitterly at the downfall of his hopes. Still all was not yet lost, for the island still remained, and many of the old inhabitants ; so he dried his eyes when he left the gorge, and determined, notwithstanding his bad fortune, to still bear up bravely in his efforts to reconstruct the old Hellenic civilisation.

As he neared the Acropolis, he was astonished to see Helena, attended by Zoe, come hastily along the road, with a face expressive of great fear.

‘What is the matter?’ he asked hurriedly, as she fell into his arms. ‘Are you ill?—is the’—

‘The lake! the lake, father!’

A terrible fear seized Justinian’s heart, but he nevertheless controlled his feelings and spoke calmly.

‘What do you mean, Helena?’

‘The lake! it is dried up.’

In the dark Justinian could not see the lake at the bottom of the valley, but he guessed what had happened. The lake’s bottom, shattered by the subterranean convulsions, had been unable to hold the water in its cup, and the whole body had been drained off into the bowels of the earth. This, then, was the third warning of Hephaistos, and a very terrible one it was, for if the crust of the crater was so convulsed, the next thing that would happen would be an outburst of fire.

Justinian foresaw all this in a moment, but, without saying a word, led his terrified daughter back to the Acropolis, where they sat down on the steps. The moon, lately obscured by cirrous-shaped clouds, now burst out in full splendour through the thin woof, and

the Demarch with a pang saw that his beautiful valley was bereft of its gleaming silver eye. Where the calm expanse of water had been was now an ugly black gulf of rugged rock, and Justinian half expected to see fire burst fiercely from those black depths.

‘It is nothing, it is nothing, my child,’ he said, with a confidence he was far from feeling; ‘the earthquake has shattered the lake, and of course the water has drained off. Silly child, of what are you afraid?’

‘I dread lest the crater should burst into fire.’

‘There is no sign of that; we would have had warnings long ago.’

‘But, father, the earthquake! the lake!’

‘Those mean nothing. Look how frequent are earthquakes at Santorin, yet people continue to live there. As to the lake, as soon as this war is over, I will stop up the cracks at the bottom, and it will soon be filled again. Are the women afraid?’

‘Some of them; still they are all sleeping down below with the children, so I don’t think they attach much importance to the disappearance of the lake.’

‘And are you less brave than these poor things? Helena, I thought you were braver.’

‘I told Miss Helena there was no danger,’ said Zoe in English, with her pretty foreign accent.



‘There, you see, Helena! Zoe is not afraid.’

‘Oh, I am better now you are with me,’ said Helena smiling through her tears; ‘but it is so lonely here with no one but Zoe and that man who drives the engine.’

‘Where are the servants?’

‘I sent them down to look after the wounded who are in the village. But, papa—Maurice?’

‘He is all right, and sends you this kiss—there!’

‘Dear Maurice, he never forgets me!—and Crispin?’

‘Has safely left the island with Gurt, so, you see, help will soon arrive. You must be brave, Helena; things are not so bad as you think.’

‘I am glad to hear you say so, father.’

‘I do say so. You have not spoken of this volcano business to any one—and you, Zoe?’

‘No, no!’ cried both the girls in chorus; ‘not a word.’

‘That is right; I do not wish any one to be frightened unnecessarily, and you will think of neither war nor volcanoes in a few days. But come, Helena, give me something to eat.’

‘Will you stay here, father?’ asked the girl, as she led the way into the Acropolis.

‘No, I am a soldier, and must live as the other

soldiers. Let me have a meal here, and then you can go to bed, while I return to the front.'

'Can I come down to-morrow?'

'No, you have acted the heroine quite enough. There will be some tough work to-morrow, and I don't want to risk losing you, my treasure.'

'I may lose Maurice.'

'Don't think of such a thing. He is a true Roylands, and bears a charmed life; something to do with that amber heart, I suppose.'

'Did Maurice tell you, father?'

'No; some magical nonsense, I suppose. Well, well, come and give your poor father something to eat, for, war or no war, I must have supper.'



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### UNDER THE UNION JACK.

*The cross of St. Andrew, the cross of St. George,  
Are blent in the folds which are flung to the air,  
And proud floats the flag at the head of the gorge,  
Proclaiming the presence of Englishmen there.*

*Red tint for the blood which is shed by the brave,  
White, symbol of honour no cowardice taints,  
With blue as a sign of the circling wave,  
And crosses that witness our faith and our saints.*

*It streams o'er the battle, forbidding retreat,  
Reminding us ever of Albion's name ;  
Brave banner of England, unsoiled by defeat,  
The token of victory, valour, and fame.*

*Shot-ragged with bullets on numberless plains,  
Its folds with the hearts' blood of Englishmen red,  
Unbeaten, undaunted it ever remains,  
A sign for the living, a shroud for the dead.*



‘It must remain here,’ said Justinian proudly ;  
‘once the English flag has been brought to  
the front, it cannot retreat.’

‘Let us hoist it by all means,’ replied Maurice

cheerfully ; 'but, remember, only seven Englishmen fight under its folds.'

'Well, I guess, Mr. Roylands, half a dozen Englishmen are worth fifty Greeks !' cried Dick with great confidence. 'Once we get that Union Jack up, and I'd like to see who'd pull it down.'

It was early morning, and they were talking about the flag which Helena had brought down on the previous day. As the bulk of their army consisted of Melnosians, who did not understand the sacred feeling with which it was regarded by the English, Maurice thought it hardly worth while to plant it on the palisade ; but the Demarch, in spite of his independent sovereignty, was patriotic to the core of his brave old heart, and, with a touch of sentiment, insisted that the attack should be repelled under the unconquered banner. Maurice therefore humoured his uncle, and agreed to his wish, so the five sailors planted a stout pole just inside the barricade, and in a few minutes the flag of England was floating proudly at the mouth of the gorge.

As yet the enemy had made no move, so Justinian had plenty of time to complete his defensive preparations. In spite of her father's veto, Helena, mindful of Maurice's instructions regarding broken glass, had

come down at dawn with her women, all bearing bottles, crockery, and earthen jars, which were speedily smashed to atoms and strewn plentifully on the ground between the mine and the barrier. Alexandros had his battery in good working order, and had ensconced himself behind a rock some little distance away, from which, on being signalled to by the Demarch, he could explode the mine at the proper time. The Melnosians had managed to snatch a few hours' sleep, and, encouraged by their victory of the previous day, were ready for the fight, so a sense of great hopefulness was diffused among the valiant little garrison. What with the mine to blow up the enemy, the broken glass to cut their bare feet,—no ineffective defence,—the guns ready loaded to sweep them down as they swarmed up, and the stern determination of the defenders to fight to the bitter end, Justinian felt that, in spite of being outnumbered, he would be able to hold the island until the return of Crispin with reinforcements. The more perilous became the position, the higher arose the spirits of the defenders, especially those of the sailors, on whose patriotic feelings the presence of their country's flag had a wonderfully inspiring effect.

‘Now then, Helena,’ said her father, when all preparations were complete, ‘you had better return to the Acropolis with the women.’

‘Very well, father; but I shall be very anxious for your safety.’

‘What about me?’ asked Maurice reproachfully.

‘Oh, you’ve got your talisman,’ she replied, with an attempt at lightness, ‘so you will be quite safe; but I am not so sure about father.’

‘Don’t trouble your head about me,’ said the Demarch kissing her; ‘if I die I die, and if I live I live—it’s the fortune of war. The best thing you can do, Helena, is to go down to the valley and attend to those poor fellows who are wounded. I know you will be very anxious, my dear, so I will send Temistocles to you every now and then with information as to how the fight is getting on. Now, good-bye, my dear child, and keep up your spirits.’

‘I will walk up with you to the head of the pass,’ said Maurice, turning away from the palisade; ‘there is no sign of the enemy getting under arms yet, so I can easily spare a few minutes.’

Helena of course was delighted at thus having her lover all to herself for even a quarter of an hour, and walked beside him up the gorge, followed by

the women, who had taken an affectionate farewell of their sons, husbands, and brothers. Zoe also was weeping bitterly, as she had just parted from Dick, and dreaded lest she should never see him again. Indeed, despite the danger, the men at the front were less to be pitied than those women remaining behind in the interior of the island, for while the former were at least too occupied to fret over their troubles, the latter, with nothing to take their minds off the disasters surrounding them, were in a state of suspense pitiable to behold.

‘Do you think Crispin will come back within the week, Maurice?’ asked Helena, as she walked arm in arm with her lover.

‘I hope so! If he is picked up by the Cretan steamer, and his yacht is now lying at Syra, I have no doubt he will; but it is all the merest chance. However, come what may, I think we can defend the island to the end.’

‘It is not of the danger without, but of the danger within I am thinking.’

‘Why, what do you mean?’

‘This volcano’ — began Helena, upon which Maurice interrupted her with a merry laugh of scorn.

‘My dear one, do not fright yourself with false

fears. I suppose you are thinking of the earthquake?’

‘Yes; and of the lake and the springs.’

‘What is the matter with them?’

‘The springs are spouting furiously, and the lake has disappeared.’

‘Great heavens! that does sound ominous,’ said Maurice anxiously. ‘Does your father know?’

‘Of course he does, but he told me not to speak of it, lest the people should become panic-stricken, but of course such prohibition does not extend to you.’

‘The lake gone! the springs active!’ repeated Roylands in a musing tone. ‘I am afraid there is danger of the volcano breaking out again.’

‘So I think; but father laughs at all my fears.’

‘It would be a terrible catastrophe should such a thing happen, for not one of us could hope to escape. Besides, if Melnos became an active volcano, all your father’s forty years of hard work would go for nothing.’

‘Do you think it is likely an eruption will take place, Maurice?’ asked Helena in a tremulous voice. ‘You have no idea how afraid I am.’

‘Egad! it is enough to make any one afraid; however, I think you can set your mind at rest, Helena.



The eruption, if there is to be one, cannot possibly take place for a week, and by that time Crispin's yacht will have arrived ; so if there are any signs of an outbreak, we can escape at once.'

'Oh, I hope so ! I trust so !'

'What does worry me,' pursued Maurice meditatively, 'is all this war going on for what may turn out to be nothing but a heap of cinders. It would be the very irony of fate, if, after beating back the foe, this volcano should start, and drive us away from the very place we have defended.'

'If such a thing happened, I do not think my father would survive.'

'It would be a blow, certainly,' replied Roylands, affecting a cheerfulness he was far from feeling ; 'but one can do nothing against the giant forces of nature. However, Helena, remember all the wealth of Melnos is safe in London, thanks to the wisdom of my uncle ; so if Hephaistos does start a forge here, which he seems inclined to do, we would simply have to abandon this island, and start our scheme of a new Hellas on another ; but this time we would select one less dangerous from a volcanic point of view.'

'But think of forty years' work thrown away !'

'And think of leaving this paradise ! However, if

the archangel waves his flaming sword, we must ; still, if I go, my Eve will be with me, and that will comfort me greatly.'

'Ah, my dear, dear Maurice !— Oh, what is that ?'

'The roll of a drum,' cried Roylands, stopping abruptly. 'The enemy must have begun the attack, so I will have to return to my post. Good-bye, my dearest, and don't trouble yourself. Remember, I have your amber heart.'

'And my real heart also.'

'Well, I leave mine with you for safety ; so I can't be shot through the heart, can I ? Jove ! there's the drum again. Give me a kiss. There, good-bye, my dear one.'

Down the gorge he tore at full speed, for he already heard the sharp crack of a musket-shot ; and Helena, remaining where she was, sank on her knees, which example was followed by all her women ; and the whole company, with uplifted hands, implored the protection of Heaven for their dear ones at the front.

Maurice arrived at the barrier just in time, for the enemy were already scrambling up the slope ; and Justinian, catching sight of his nephew, shouted out to him to redouble his speed.

‘Quick, quick, Maurice! Confound it, sir! they’ll be on us in a few minutes.’

‘Well, that will be just time for me to recover my breath,’ said the young man good-humouredly. ‘All in order, uncle?’

‘Yes. We’ll meet them with rifle-shots first, and give them a chance of cutting their feet to pieces.’

‘But if we let them get so near, they will assault the barrier.’

‘What! after crossing those broken bottles bare-footed? Don’t you believe it, my lad. They will be jumping about like cats on hot bricks shortly.’

All the Melnosians were in a high state of glee over this snare for the enemy, which was so simple, yet dangerous, and yelled with laughter as the foremost stormers dashed with their bare feet right into the centre of the sharp points. Of course, the vigour with which they rushed forward rendered the glass all the more effective; and, after receiving them with a volley of musket-shot, the garrison paused to roar with laughter at the sight of the bare-legged islanders hopping in agony over the broken points. It was not dignified, it was not particularly dangerous, and could hardly be called legitimate war; yet, by this simple means, the first rush was effectually checked;

and, streaming with blood, the enraged stormers retired, leaving a few of their dead, who had been killed and wounded by the volley, lying on the field.

The information concerning this stratagem soon passed from mouth to mouth, and those of the enemy who were not yet climbing up the hill, dashed back to their tents, from whence, after a time, they emerged, wearing tough leathern sandals, with the hair still on, bound round their feet by strong thongs. Those who had been wounded in this novel manner had, regardless of safety, sat down within rifle range to tie up their bleeding feet; and Justinian, with more generosity than they would have displayed in like circumstances, refrained from firing on them thus defenceless.

Caliphronas, who, since the death of Alcibiades, now held supreme command of this irregular army, saw his forbearance, and, sneering at Justinian for a soft-hearted fool, with, for him, exceptional courage, led those of his men who were booted across the dangerous ground. Apparently he had quite forgotten how Alcibiades had carried forward his stormers the previous day under the shelter of the cliff, for, advancing thus in a compact body full in

front of the palisade, they were exposed to a raking fire from the muskets of the garrison.

‘Lions led by a deer are not dangerous,’ quoth Justinian grimly, on seeing this bad generalship. ‘I don’t think we’ll have such a bad time of it as we did yesterday.’

‘Certainly not, while Caliphronas is general of the enemy,’ replied Maurice laughing; ‘but he has some courage, I see, for he leads his stormers.’

‘I’ll soon frighten him back, sir,’ said Dick, who hated Caliphronas for his treachery on the night of the wreck; ‘shall I fire?’

‘Wait a minute, till they are more conglomerate. Now!’

The gun roared, and a shower of grape-shot splashed over the advancing body, which did considerable damage in their ranks, if such disorderly huddling could be dignified by such a name. They still continued to come on, however, on noting which, Justinian, who, in default of Gurt, had charge of the other gun, sent another shower of grape among them.

They wavered for a moment, but, as their leader still urged them to come on, Maurice snatched a rifle from the man nearest him, and aimed deliberately at Caliphronas, not with the intention of killing him, but

merely forcing him to retire wounded. The ball struck Caliphronas on the elbow of his sword-arm, and with a yell of pain he dropped his weapon and ran away, followed, as a matter of course, by his soldiers.

‘At this rate, Maurice, we can hold the island for a year,’ said the Demarch, with a jeering laugh; ‘it’s child’s play compared with yesterday.’

‘If we can get them on that mine, and explode it in good time, the siege will be over,’ replied his nephew decisively.

‘I am averse to useless massacre.’

‘So am I, but if we don’t put the fear of God into their souls, they will wear us out by these puny attacks. One bold stroke, and they will fly.’

‘Well, do what you will. I have every confidence in your generalship.’

The enemy again charged up the hill, but this time Caliphronas was conspicuous by his absence, as he was evidently in the camp attending to his wound. A huge man in an Albanian dress was leading this time, and had at least the virtue of brute courage, for, in spite of the musket-shots and double discharge of the cannon, which killed many, he still advanced with his men right up to the palisade.

‘Hand-to-hand again,’ said Dick, as the Melnosians began to use their bayonets, ‘but they won’t get over the barricade this time.’

As the barrier was now built of nothing but turf overlaid with sand-bags and gabions, the besiegers found their axes of no use, and were reduced to swarming up to the top of the parapet in overwhelming numbers. The garrison, however, shot freely into the struggling mass, but in doing this had to expose themselves greatly, and in consequence lost many men. Still, they managed to drive back the besiegers, and the two cannon belched forth grape-shot alternately, so that at length the enemy were forced to retreat over the brow of the hill. Thus relieved from immediate danger, the Melnosians busied themselves with their dead and wounded, carrying both to the rear, so that their fighting might not be hampered by the cumbering of the ground with bodies. In front of the barrier, the ground right over the brow of the hill was thick with the fallen of the enemy, and some of the wounded were trying to crawl to a place of safety, while others, lifting up their hands, cried out on ‘Christos.’

In a remarkably short space of time, the pirates re-formed into something like order, and, still led by

the Albanian, came once more to the point of attack. This time, however, instead of assaulting the barricade, they lay down on the crest of the hill, and began to pick off the garrison with their rifles, while every now and then a small body would make a sally forward, only to be beaten back with bayonet and cutlass. Quite unaware of the danger they were in, the whole of the firing party were camped right on top of the mine, and Justinian, wishing to end this desultory warfare, waited until they were pretty well massed before giving the signal to explode.

Twice he raised his hand to give the sign, and twice he dropped it again, from a sentiment of regret, for, scum though the besiegers were, it yet seemed a terrible thing to hurl into fragments the fifty or sixty men who were so calmly seated over the mine. Still it was a case of necessity, for the garrison, worn out with incessant fighting, were not fit to stand another assault such as had taken place the day before, and, if the pirates captured the island, every living person would be ruthlessly put to death.

Justinian was not a uselessly cruel man, and would fain have been spared the necessity of such a wholesale massacre, but when he thought of his child, and the defenceless women who would be left to the mercy



of these savages in case of capture, all feelings of pity died in his breast, so when the enemy were massed in a great number above the mine he gave the signal.

Alexandros at once sent the electric spark along the buried wires, the ground in front of the barrier heaved like a convulsed serpent, and in the concussion which followed the roar of the explosion, every one of the garrison were thrown to the ground. When they arose to their feet, the sight which met their eyes was frightful, for the ground was strewn with fragments of human bodies, legs, arms, trunks, heads, all lying about in ghastly confusion. The sky seemed to have rained blood, for their garments were splashed with the crimson fluid ; and the whole space of ground on the crest of the hill was rent and riven into huge holes. Of all the human beings resting there a few minutes before, hardly one was left alive, and down the hill fled the frightened survivors, yelling out that an earthquake had taken place. Those still in the camp caught the alarm, and ran for the boats, so in a few minutes the harbour was dotted with craft pulling hard for the entrance. Not one pirate, save those who were wounded, remained on the beach, for this frightful catastrophe, which they ascribed to natural causes, had completely routed the whole host

which had stormed the palisade so confidently a few hours before.

‘The war is over,’ said Maurice, who was very pale, for the shocking sight of the bodies in fragments was enough to make the bravest shudder ; ‘they have had a lesson, and won’t come back again.’

‘I trust not,’ said Justinian, who stood sternly under the drooping folds of the Union Jack, ‘but I doubt it while Caliphronas is alive. Still, we have gained the victory this time, and, though I am ashamed of having perpetrated such a wholesale massacre under this flag, yet necessity knows no law or mercy either.’

‘If we had not beaten them by that time, they would have beaten us,’ said Maurice, taking a pull at his brandy-flask, ‘for all our men are about worn out, and could not have stood another assault. We have lost a good few too, and I doubt, uncle, if, out of your hundred and twenty subjects, you have more than thirty left.’

‘It has indeed been a severe struggle,’ replied Justinian sadly, ‘but now, thank God, it is over—at least, for a time ; but, as sure as you stand there, Maurice, Caliphronas will come back with a fresh set of blackguards.’

‘By that time, Crispin and his reinforcements will

have arrived, so we will soon be able to drive them back. Dick !’

‘ Yes, sir !’

‘ We must repair damages, and bury the dead.’

‘ Right, sir !’

It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they began this task, and not until nightfall were the dead buried decently in shallow graves dug in the sea-shore sand. Papa Athanasius came down with all the women from the village, and read the service of the Greek Church over the remains of friend and foe alike, so that when the moon arose above the peaks of Melnos, there was no sign of a struggle having taken place, save in the battered barricade and the rent ground.

When all was completed, Justinian held a consultation with his nephew and Dick as to the probability of the foe returning soon, as, if there was a possibility of such an event happening, it would be unwise to leave the barrier unguarded. Ultimately, it was decided to leave sentries on guard, with cannon and muskets loaded, and Alexandros directed the search light full on the entrance of the harbour, so that, in the event of the enemy returning, they could be seen before reaching shore, and the alarm given at once. Temis-

tocles, who was still in good condition, as he had done no fighting, was left behind also, in order that if an attack were made, he might run to the Acropolis to alarm Justinian.

These arrangements having been made, the survivors of the fierce fighting returned to the village, in order to take the rest they so much needed. Loud were the wailings for the dead from the Melnosian women, many of whom were now alone in the world, and all that night those sleeping in the Acropolis heard the sounds of bitter sorrow rising from the valley below. It had been a tough fight, many had been lost, and much damage had been done ; still, the foe had been forced to retreat, and Melnos was still under the rule of the Demarch.

That night the leaders were all gathered round the supper-table, to make the first good meal they had tasted for days, and Helena and Zoe waited on them, for all the rest of the servants were down in the village looking after the wounded men. All of them looked worn out and haggard, for the strain, both physical and mental, had been something terrible; and even now, like Justinian, Maurice and Dick, gifted as they were with iron constitutions, were nearly broken down by the terrible experiences they had undergone.

‘My poor Helena, you look fit to drop,’ said Maurice tenderly, drawing her down beside him. ‘Rest yourself for a time, and do not be so afraid. All danger is now past.’

‘But think of the many lives that have been lost.’

‘I do, and regret them ; still, selfish as it may sound, remember we are all safe, and, after all, that is a great thing.’

‘I am sure I don’t know how long we shall be safe with this volcano.’

‘Nonsense, Helena!’ said her father in a vexed tone; ‘I tell you there is no danger there. Nothing new has happened that I know of. The island is quite safe, but if there are any chances of an outburst, we will get away in Crispin’s yacht.’

‘That is what I was saying to Helena this morning. But will you abandon the new Hellas?’

‘I must if Hephaistos bids me. The bravest man can do nothing against a burning mountain. No, Maurice, if I am driven from Melnos, I will no longer fight against fate ; already, by the death of so many, a great deal of my forty years’ labour has proved futile, so if the crowning touch is put to it by the outbreak of the volcano, I will throw up the game.’

‘And return to England?’

‘Yes. I am old now, and want rest, so I have no doubt you and Helena will give me a corner at the Grange. It will be a great blow to me should things turn out in this way; still, I may be too pessimistic, and all may yet be well.’

‘If I may make so bold, sir,’ said Dick, who had been talking in a whisper to Zoe, ‘what, may I ask, is to become of me. Zoe, here, says, if Miss Helena goes to England, she will go too.’

‘Well, you will accompany her, Dick,’ said Maurice genially; ‘and I have no doubt that, when you are married, I shall be able to give you a billet at the Grange.’

‘Buy a yacht, sir?’

‘No, I leave that to Mr. Crispin, so you can still take service under him, and make Zoe stewardess. But we are all looking at the black side of things; the mountain may remain quiet, in which case I will still stay here and carry out Justinian’s scheme of the new Hellas.’

‘Hear! hear!’ cried Dick, lifting his glass. ‘Beggin’ pardon, sir, but here’s to the health of Mr. Justinian!’

‘Coupled with the name of Mr. Roylands, who is

a hero,' said Justinian, bowing his thanks for the compliment.

'And add Helena's name also, for she is a heroine,' cried Maurice gaily. 'Now then, uncle, Dick, Helena, Zoe! three cheers for our noble selves!'

These were given, and after that, quite worn out, all retired to rest.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE PREY OF THE GODS.

*Far down the valley the altars are reared,  
The off'ring no power can delay ;  
For gods never honoured, yet gods ever feared,  
Claim their prey.*

*The fire that springs from the womb of the earth  
Will flame on these altars of fear ;  
The songs of the living, the laughter and mirth,  
None will hear.*

*For weepings and wailings of hundreds afraid  
Rolls up 'neath the sting of the rods ;  
The worship is ended, the sacrifice made  
To the gods.*



THINGS went along very smoothly for the next two days, as there was no sign of the pirates returning, nor did the volcano hint at any near outbreak of fire. Gradually the diminished population settled down to their old occupations, for Justinian, in spite of the terrible events which had lately taken up the attention of



every one, judged it wisest to prevent any disorganisation of his social system. The few men surviving returned to their work, and did their best by constant industry to make up for their lack of numbers, though, indeed, a dismal silence had settled down on this rural population, once so gay and mirthful. Later on, when all fear of an invasion had passed away, Justinian intended to make an excursion round the Archipelago in search of new colonists, and had but little fear that he would be able to obtain as many as he wished, for many islanders would be only too glad to place themselves under the protection of the wealthy, eccentric Englishman.

Thanks to the Demarch's wisdom in storing his money with his London solicitors, he had plenty of capital on which to draw, and when things were once more quiet, and Melnos repopulated from the adjacent islands, he made up his mind to at once restore the tunnel to its former perfection. Certainly it would take some time to gather a number of pure-blooded Hellenes for his colony, but with plenty of capital at his back, and the productions of the island in a flourishing condition, he could afford to wait. Besides, he had Maurice now beside him, and the young fellow was a man after his own heart, for, in

contrast to his former listlessness when in England, he flung himself into Justinian's schemes with an ardour which delighted the old man. With himself to conceive, and his nephew to carry out, the Demarch was quite jubilant in spite of his late reverses, for he foresaw that in such capable hands Melnos would soon be restored to its pristine glory.

The only thing, therefore, which agitated his mind, was the dread he felt lest Caliphronas should again assault Melnos with another army of cut-throats. Calmly as Justinian had taken the treachery of the Greek, yet in his own soul he felt deeply hurt that his years of kindness had met with so base a return. He had found Caliphronas a poor shepherd lad on the island of Andros,—he had educated, clothed, and fed him for many years,—and now, when perilous times came, not only was the ungrateful scamp absent from his side, but actually arrayed against him, being in every way an active agent in bringing ruin on his benefactor. However, if the pirates, headed by this accomplished villain, did appear again, the Demarch knew well that he could not hope to hold out against them for any lengthy period, as, owing to the smallness of his garrison, incessant watching, fighting, and

suspense would wear out even the bravest among them.

In this dilemma there was only one thing left to do, should the pirates reappear, and that was to close up the pass by means of the overhanging rocks at the cliff entrance. True, it would shut up all within the island in a crater which threatened to break out; still, from all appearances, such a volcanic outburst did not seem likely to take place, therefore, if the pass were firmly sealed, they would at least be free from their dangerous enemies without, until such time as Melnos could be re-peopled, and thus defend itself. Notwithstanding the earthquake, the disappearance of the lake, the activity of the hot springs, the Demarch could not believe that this crater, extinct for so many thousands of years, would break out in eruption without giving, at least, some serious warning; therefore, with this idea, he determined, if the worst came to the worst, to shut himself and his people in, by closing up the gorge, rather than abandon his forty years of work to the mercy of a band of Levantine blackguards.

As to Helena and Maurice, they were perfectly happy in making love to one another; and, in the intervals of such a delightful occupation, the young

Englishman looked after the palisade, at which two sentries were constantly posted, wandered about the village with his uncle, attending to local matters, and twice or thrice a day went to the vantage-point above the side staircase, in order to watch for the appearance of Crispin and his yacht. Daily both Maurice and his uncle swept the offing with their glasses, but no thin line of smoke or glancing white sail showed that *The Eunice* was on her way to aid these unfortunates.

Nor during all this time was Dick idle, for, with a small body of men, he had posted himself above the overhanging rocks at the entrance of the pass, and there they drilled holes in the soft volcanic soil for the reception of dynamite cartridges. When these were placed sufficiently deep, Alexandros attached his wires to them, and then threw these thread-like conductors across the abyss to the opposite side of the pass. At the point where Crispin had gone over the cliff a few nights previously, he established a small battery and fixed the wires thereto, so, in the event of the pirates approaching the island, the man who was on the look-out at the vantage-point had simply to touch the button of the battery, when the enormous rocks on the other side of the gorge would

crash down in Titanic fragments closing up the narrow way irretrievably. Still, as before stated, the Demarch, on account of a lurking suspicion of the extinct volcano, was unwilling to avail himself of this aid until the last moment, but in any event, if that last moment did come, the rocks could be exploded from the vantage-point with the greatest ease. The ropes which had been used to let down Crispin and Gurt were still attached to the trunk of the pine tree, but had been carefully drawn up, lest by chance, if the pirates arrived, they could enter the island by ascending such a convenient ladder, notwithstanding the closing of the pass.

On the early morning of the fourth day after Crispin had departed, Justinian and his nephew, ascending the path at the back of the Acropolis, went down to the vantage-point through the altar glade, according to custom, in order to look for signs of the poet's return. The east was yet rosy with the dawn, and the great expanse of ocean slept below them in serene calm. The long white waves broke gently on the sandy beach, there was not a breath of wind, and when the sun arose suddenly out of the sea, his long yellow rays shot like bridges of gold across the water, while his orb, invisible to the

watchers, projected the shadow of the island on the liquid plain in front.

Themistocles had been on the watch for some considerable time, and as the electric light was kept all night constantly sweeping the surface of the sea in search of strange boats, Justinian asked the runner if there had been any indications of approaching danger. Receiving a reply in the negative, he put up his glass in hopes of discovering some signs of the long-expected and much-desired yacht, but not a speck could he behold, in spite of the power of his glasses and the keenness of his eyesight.

‘It’s four days since he went away,’ said the Demarch to Maurice with a sigh, as he put down his glass; ‘yet he does not seem to be coming back.’

‘You must allow him more time, uncle,’ replied Maurice comfortingly; ‘you know everything may not have gone exactly as we thought. He may have cruised about some time before being picked up by the Cretan steamer, and even if he were fortunate in meeting a boat at once on his arrival at Syra, the yacht may not have been lying there.’

‘The yacht has had plenty of time to get to Syra,

Maurice; but either he has missed the steamer, or else he finds some difficulty in obtaining men from the Eparch of Syra.'

'But surely in an urgent case like this the Eparch will send you help at once. You say he is your friend.'

'Certainly he says he is, but my belief is that he is jealous of my independent sovereignty, and would not be sorry to see my little government come to an end.'

'What a nice old gentleman he must be! But tell me, uncle, what is the difference between a Demarch and an Eparch?'

'One rules over one island, the other over many. As a matter of fact, a Demarch is a kind of mayor, and really it is too small a title for me, seeing I have a whole island to myself. Still, I am quite satisfied with it, as King of Melnos is out of the question, and Prince of Melnos sounds like the hero of a penny novelette.'

'And what islands does the Eparch of Syra rule over?'

'Well, really, I quite forget; but the Eparch of Santorin rules over Amorgo, Anapli, Santorin, and Ios.'

‘Of course all these Epochs—or what is it?—Eparchs—are subject to the government of King George?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Then I don’t wonder they envy you this island. I suppose you are the only independent prince in the Ægean?’

‘I am now, but in former times there were many. An Italian family ruled as Dukes of Naxos, another line governed Seriphos, but those potentates were somewhere about the fifteenth century. I think the ruler likeliest to myself was one Capsi, a kind of ancient pirate, of the Alcibiades type, who became ruler of Melos.’

‘Melnos?’

‘No; the Island of Melos, without the “n.” It is a curious coincidence, is it not, the similarity of name and rule?’

‘Very; but what became of King Capsi?’

‘Oh, the Turks invited him to Stamboul, and then cut off his head for presuming to set himself up as a rival to the Sultan. But such a fate is not likely to happen to me, as I am very good friends with Abdul Hamid.’

‘I think we had better establish a line of princes, uncle,’ said Maurice in a joking tone. ‘You will



take the title of Justinian I.; when I succeed to the throne, I will be Justinian II.; and if Helena and myself are fortunate enough to present you with a grandson, he will be Justinian III. So, you see, we have an excellent beginning for a royal family.'

'I do not see why it should not be so,' replied the Demarch seriously; 'look at the Brookes, who became Rajahs of Sarawak, and the Bernadottes, now Kings of Sweden, and then again the Bonaparte family. My dear Maurice, believe me, there are still kingdoms to be gained, if he who seeks has the nerve, judgment, and fortune of a born adventurer.'

'Such as yourself.'

'Exactly; and you are of the same type. Oh that I were younger, Maurice, and with you by my side, we would go to South America and carve out a kingdom. You smile, but I tell you it can be done.'

'It has been done in Melnos.'

'Oh, that is nothing! an intellectual training school only; but I mean a real large kingdom on a continent.'

'I may be like you in some things, uncle, but I do not think I have your ambition, as I will be quite content with my island sovereignty of Melnos.'

‘I daresay you are wise. But, Maurice, what a story all your and my adventures would make—the way you were brought here by Andros—the description of the crater—the attack on the island—why, it would make a capital romance!’

‘Which nobody would believe. They would look upon it as an embroidered lie of the *Alroy* species.’

‘Ah, the author of that book—Disraeli—what a man!’

“‘The wondrous boy wot wrote *Alroy*,”’ quoted Maurice laughing. ‘Yes, he certainly was clever; a little too fond in his books of Oriental splendour perhaps, but a genius as a statesman.’

‘If Disraeli had been an Eastern vizier, he would have become a king.’

‘What a desultory conversation!’ said his nephew laughing; ‘we began with Eparchs and end with possible sovereigns. Well, as far as I am concerned, this island is big enough for me and the Princess Helena.’

‘Who is talking of the Princess Helena?’ cried a gay voice behind them, and, on turning, they saw the princess herself, with her arms as usual full of flowers, looking at them both with a smile in her eyes.

‘I am the culprit, your Highness,’ said Maurice, bowing. ‘When did you arrive?’

‘This very moment; so if you have been saying nice things about me, you may as well repeat them.’

‘Vanity! vanity!’

‘All is vanity! If that is the only thing you have to say to me, I will go.’

‘I think we had better all go,’ said Justinian, turning away from the cliff. ‘I am anxious for breakfast, but you young people, I suppose, are content to live on love?’

‘Not in this keen morning air, father. But have you seen any sign of the yacht?’

‘Not the slightest!’

‘What a bad thing! and the pirates?’

‘No appearance of those gentlemen either.’

‘What a good thing! I wonder who will arrive first, Crispin or Caliphronas!’

‘I trust the former,’ answered her father hopefully; ‘but I dread the latter.’

‘Oh dear me!’ said Helena with a sigh; ‘I do wish he would leave us alone. Why cannot he get an island of his own?’

‘Ah, that’s just it, my child! He does not desire an island so much as you.’

‘He will never get me,’ she answered resolutely. ‘Sooner than become the wife of that traitor, I would throw myself over the cliff.’

‘You can rest quite content, Helena,’ said Maurice, with quiet determination; ‘if Caliphronas overwhelms Melnos with his forces, he shall not obtain the prize he desires. If he captures you, it will be over my dead body.’

‘Then he’ll never capture me, for you can easily conquer such a coward,’ retorted the girl with great spirit; ‘and, after all, I don’t believe he’ll have the courage to come back.’

‘Uncle,’ cried Roylands suddenly, as he saw Justinian stumble, ‘what is the matter? Do you feel ill?’

‘Not exactly ill,’ replied the Demarch, taking his nephew’s arm; ‘but, to tell you the truth, I awoke this morning feeling very sick and faint.’

‘Why, papa, so did I!’ exclaimed Helena in surprise; ‘that is why I came down to the cliffs to obtain a breath of fresh air.’

‘I also had a headache when I awoke,’ said Maurice, after a pause; ‘so, as we have all felt the same thing, there must be some malaria in the air.’

Justinian gave a cry of alarm, and his face blanched white under its bronze.

‘Oh, Maurice! I dread to think what it may be!’

‘Why, uncle, what do you mean?’

‘The vapours of the volcano!’

Both Helena and her lover grew pale at these ominous words.

‘Still,’ said the latter anxiously, ‘if they do nothing but give headaches’—

‘You forget,’ replied Justinian in a sombre tone, as they entered the Acropolis; ‘we are half-way up the crater, but if the vapours are rising from the volcano, think of all my people in the valley.’

Without waiting a moment, the three, in a state of great alarm, hurried to the platform in front of the temple, and looked anxiously down to the village. Although it was now seven o’clock, and the Melnosians were early risers, there was no appearance of life in the valley below, no sound of labour or voices ascended, no smoke curled upward from the chimneys; but in the still morning the cup of the crater lay spread out before them, a scene of exquisite beauty, yet terribly, ominously calm.

‘Great God!’ cried Justinian, with a strangled sob; ‘can it be as I feared?’

A man came staggering along the mulberry avenue, waving his arms wildly, and when he came sufficiently near, they saw it was the bos'n Dick, pale and haggard, reeling in his gait like a drunken man.

Maurice ran forward to help him as he advanced, and ultimately had to carry him to the steps of the Acropolis, while Helena, by her father's direction, ran inside for brandy and smelling-salts. With these they revived the almost insensible sailor, who opened his eyes with a shudder, only to find three faces scarcely less haggard than his own bending over him. None of them asked what had happened, for the intense quiet of that valley told its own terrible story, and Justinian knew that in one night he had lost the whole of his subjects through the deadly vapours breathed by the awakening volcano.

'Oh, Mr. Justinian! Mr. Roylands! it is horrible—horrible!' said Dick, sitting up with difficulty. 'They are all dead!—not one left alive; and my poor messmates are gone also. Let us leave this cursed place, sir, or we shall die also.'

Dick had fought bravely all through the campaign, and was a man but little given to emotion, yet so unnerved was he by the fearful catastrophe that had happened, that he buried his face in his hands and

almost wept in the intensity of his agony. Maurice and Helena also were paralysed with dread, for, however daring human beings may be, the most resolute quail before the gigantic powers of nature, and, high-spirited as they all were, their hearts thrilled with fear as they recognised in what a death-trap they were snared.

Only Justinian preserved a certain amount of calmness,—Justinian, who suffered more than the others, for this was the crowning blow, and his whole untiring labour of forty years had been swept away as naught in a single hour.

‘It is not a valley,’ he cried, looking downward in despair ; ‘it is a tomb enclosing many dead. Oh, my poor Melnosians!’

‘How did you discover it, Dick?’ asked Maurice in an awed tone.

‘After you went away this morning, sir, I walked down to the valley, in order to get my messmates to go on with that mining work in the pass ; but I felt a bit headachy and queer. However, I did not think about it, and went down the stair. Just as I got down half-way, I felt a poisonous breath of air wafted up from below, which seized me by the throat, and made me fall down insensible by that statue of

Apollo. I don't know how long I lay; but it was lucky I was not farther down, or else I would have been stifled; as it was, little breaths of the gases floated up, but the cool air above revived me somewhat, and I managed to crawl up higher. Then I came along, sir; and you helped me here.'

'And are all dead?'

'They must be,' said Justinian in a tone of despair. 'I see how it is we escaped. You know the Grotto del Cane at Naples, Maurice, where a man can enter freely, but a dog dies? that is because the vapours only rise a certain height. Down below there, when all were sleeping, the gases must have been breathed slowly from the mouth of the volcano, and stifled every soul. They could not rise higher on account of their weight, so we managed to escape death. Look at that valley!' cried the Demarch with a passionate gesture; 'it is a smiling death-trap. We can see nothing; but half way up the cup it is filled with deadly poison, which would kill us were we to descend. Oh, my poor people!—dead! dead! all dead!'

He hid his face in his hands, overcome with horror at the sight; and Dick, somewhat cured of the poisonous vapours he had inhaled, arose to his feet with an effort.



‘We must get away from here, Mr. Maurice. We dare not stay another night, for even if that volcano remains quiet, the gases will rise and rise until the Acropolis will be below their level. We must fly.’

‘And how can we fly?’ asked Justinian abruptly. ‘We have no boats—those scoundrels of Caliphronas’ have destroyed them all. The only thing we can do is to abandon the Acropolis, and go to the sea-shore, in order to wait the arrival of Crispin to save us.’

‘But if the volcano breaks out, uncle?’

‘In that case we must die. The island is so small, that, with this crater in full fury, we would be crushed under the weight of the stones thrown out, or burned to death by the streams of lava. Our only hope is Crispin; and, as to this death-trap, we must leave it at once. Helena!’

Helena did not answer. She was crouching down with her head on the lap of Zoe, who had joined the group; and the two girls, too terrified to speak, lay silent with horror, a mere huddled mass of humanity.

‘How many of us are left alive?’ asked Maurice, raising the girl to her feet.

‘About ten, sir,’ replied Dick, making a rapid calculation. ‘Those two who are on sentry-go at the

palisade, Alexandros, who is down there attending to the mine, Temistocles, who is on the look-out, the man here who drives the engine, myself, Zoe, Miss Helena, yourself, and Mr. Justinian.'

The Demarch flung up his hands with a cry of horror.

'Ten survivors out of nearly two hundred people! Oh, there is a curse on me and mine! It is useless to fight against fate, Maurice. We must fly this very minute, and trust to Providence to be spared until the arrival of the yacht. Hark! what is that?'

There was a low moan, which seemed to come from the lips of the crater, and a moment afterwards the earth trembled slightly. It was the dreaded voice of the earthquake, as they knew only too well; and, with a sudden impulse, all turned to fly. The valley smiled peaceful and serene in the brilliant sunshine, the white peaks glittered like Pentelican marble against the sky, the delicate green of the foliage, the myriad hues of the flowers met their eyes on all sides; yet under this mask of smiling loveliness raged fierce subterranean fires, which were already pressing furiously upward to shatter the whole beautiful scene into Titanic fragments of stone.

'Let us take provisions, water, wine—what we can,'

said Justinian rapidly, as he led the way into the Acropolis. 'There is not a moment to be lost. We must fly without delay.'

The unfortunates made as much speed as they could, and collected all the food they could find, assisted by Argyropoulos, who had been called by the Demarch from his engine. Fortunately there were but few valuables to take away, as Justinian had always lived with great simplicity, and all his money was safe in London. The Demarch hastily gathered up a few of his papers, some money, and a little jewellery which belonged to Helena; while the others loaded themselves only with necessities, such as provisions, wine, water, and cloaks to protect them should they have to pass the night on the beach. Helena, weeping bitterly, took leave of all her beloved flowers; and never had the court, with its snowy pillars, sparkling fountain, and odorous blossoms, looked so beautiful as it did on this fatal morning. Argos, poor bird, was strutting proudly about, quite unaware of his danger; and Helena, touched by a feeling of compassion, impulsively spoke to Maurice.

'Shall we take Argos with us?'

'I am afraid we cannot, my dear girl. See, we are all heavily laden. Where is my uncle?'

‘He has gone to take a last look at the valley,’ said Helena bursting into tears.

‘Poor uncle!’

At that moment Justinian reappeared in the court, with a haggard face, his shoulders bent with the weight of his grief. In a few hours he had aged years, and now this terrible blow had broken him down completely. He had taken one last farewell of the valley he loved so much, of his dead people who were there sleeping in their terrible tomb, of all his schemes for reviving the old Hellas of the past; and now took up his burden, in common with the rest, to abandon the Acropolis for ever.

The little band sadly left the beautiful home in which they could no longer hope to dwell, and took their melancholy way up the winding path which led up to the altar glade. Argyropoulos went first, then Dick came, supporting the weeping Zoe, and finally Justinian, with his nephew on one side and his daughter on the other, came slowly walking along, overcome with grief. All his schemes, all his expenditure, all his works were now at an end; and, as far as results went, the last forty years of his busy life had been absolutely wasted.

Just as they reached the altar inscribed ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ

ΘΕΩ, which had witnessed of late the birth of young love, Temistocles, in a state of great excitement, came running up the path which led from the cliffs.

‘Kyrios! Kyrios! the pirates! pirates!’ he cried in Greek.

‘Another blow!’ said Justinian with a harsh cry. ‘Are we not to escape with our lives? How many boats?’

‘Eight, Kyrios, crowded with men.’

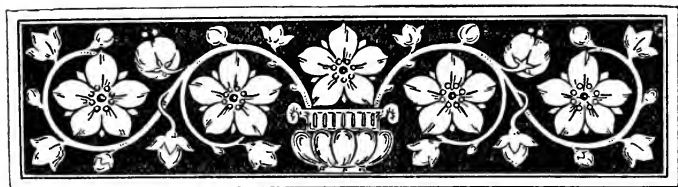
‘What misfortune!’ muttered the Demarch, letting his chin sink on his breast. ‘Pirates without—fire within. We are lost!’

‘On the contrary, we are saved,’ cried Maurice, with a sudden inspiration. ‘Don’t give way, uncle. Caliphronas has arrived at a most opportune moment, for we will use his boats in order to escape.’

‘Impossible!’

‘Not at all. I will explain my scheme when we get down to the verge of the cliff. Come, Temistocles, Dick, Argyropoulos. Forward all. We will hoist those scoundrels on their own petard.’

‘If I can,’ cried Justinian in a rage, raising his hands to heaven, ‘I will make a holocaust of them to the infernal gods!’



## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### JUSTINIAN'S REVENGE.

*The past is shattered,  
The future lost.  
Now tempest-battered,  
My soul is tossed  
From billow to billow on life's wild sea,  
With nothing but sorrow and care for me.*

*The gods have spoken,  
My prayers they spurn,  
Yet tho' thus broken,  
I make return  
Of holocausts high on their altars bare,  
An offering bitter of my despair.*



HE saying, 'It never rains but it pours,' was fully exemplified by the series of calamities which had befallen the once peaceful Isle of Fantasy and its inhabitants. First the treachery of Caliphronas, then the war which had killed so many people, now a threatened eruption of an apparently extinct volcano, and, to crown all, a

band of pirates waiting at the only outlet of escape, to massacre the survivors as they fled from the perils within. Evidently the sins of Rudolph Roylands' youth were bearing fruit, and his ancestral Ate was now exacting her full penalty for those half-forgotten episodes of his early life, by depriving him of all he valued most in the world. One thing after another had been torn from his reluctant grasp, and now it seemed as if his life itself was to crown the measure of repayment. Standing on the lofty cliff, with his nephew, daughter, and dependents beside him, Justinian watched the pirates landing from their boats with cynical despair, feeling that the end of all things had come as far as he was concerned.

Owing to the mental and physical trials of the last few weeks, the Demarch had lost to a great extent his iron nerve, and could no longer conceive, decide, and execute his projects with his former promptitude. The loss of his island had turned him from a vigorous, determined leader into a feeble old man, and although now and then his spirits did flash up with a gleam of brilliancy, it was apparent to every eye that he was no longer fitted to either lead or control matters at this final crisis of affairs. It was then that Maurice showed himself a capable commander, and, leaving his

worn-out uncle to the care of the women, instinctively took all things into his own hands without further loss of time.

Of course he still deferred to Justinian as ostensible head of the party, but it was he who made all suggestions, and the Demarch did little else than agree to his propositions. First of all, Maurice, getting from Justinian the key of the iron gate, sent Temistocles down the staircase to call up Alexandros and the two Melnosians, in order to concentrate in one spot all the survivors of the island, and decide upon a course of action. When they came up to the vantage-point, Temistocles locked the iron gate again, and restored the key to his master, after which all the men sat down to consider the position of affairs.

It was now noon, and the sun at his zenith was blazing hotly down on the lava rocks of Melnos, which, flinging back the glare, rendered the heat almost intolerable. The pirates, having drawn up their boats on the beach inside the harbour, had retreated to their old camp, the tents of which, untouched by the Melnosians, were still standing. There they evidently intended to remain until it grew cooler, in order to assault the palisade, quite ignorant that the inhabitants of Melnos were all dead, and



that the volcano was on the point of bursting out in eruption. Had they known this latter fact, they would speedily have fled away from the ill-omened spot ; but Maurice was glad they were thus ignorant, as he wished to use one of their boats, in order that himself and his party might escape from the coming explosion of the mountain.

‘Do you think the pirates will assault the palisade this afternoon, uncle?’ asked Maurice, anxious for the old warrior’s opinion.

‘No, I don’t think so,’ replied Justinian, shaking his head. ‘They have evidently been rowing here all the morning, and are tired out. It is probable they will sleep all the afternoon, and attack us just when it grows dusk. What do you propose to do, Maurice?’

‘First, pull down the palisade.’

‘What! and thus lose our only defence! You are mad!’

‘There is some method in my madness, as you will see, uncle. I wish to pull down the barrier, so that when the pirates come up to the assault, they will find no difficulty in passing up the gorge. Of course, suspecting nothing, they will make their way right into the interior of the island, while we, who are in

their rear, can go down the side staircase, on to the beach, and then push off in a boat before they return.'

'It's a good idea, sir,' said Dick, scratching his head ; 'but suppose, when they get inside the palisade, they should come up the stair and find us here.'

'They won't do that, Dick, for we will lock the gate ; and you can depend upon it, when they find the pass open, they will not waste their time in trying to force this side path. If they can gain the interior of the island by an open way, they certainly won't try to pass in by a blocked one.'

'Don't you think they will suspect treachery, Maurice ?'

'No, uncle. In the first place, most of these are new arrivals, and, in spite of what their comrades have told them, won't believe we are—or rather were—so strong. And, in the second place, they will think we have retreated up to the second palisade, so even if they stop there, we will have time to get to sea.'

'What about this, Kyrios ?' said Alexandros, pointing to the battery, which stood near ; 'shall we not wait till the enemy are under the rocks, and then bring them down to crush all ?'

‘By no means, Alexandros ; for by so doing we would close up the only avenue of escape left to us. It will not be much gratification crushing the enemy, if we only attain it by letting ourselves be blown up by the volcano.’

Alexandros looked rather unhappy at this, as he was proud of his work, and would liked to have shown how perfectly his battery worked ; but he recognised the force of Roylands’ reasoning, so said no more about it. Justinian was also silent, but simply because he had conceived a plan for punishing his enemies ; and looking at the battery, the rocks frowning over the pass, and the coils of rope near the pine tree, he glanced suddenly at Alexandros with a significant smile, whereupon the quick-witted Greek saw that the Demarch had some scheme in his head, and that his battery would yet be utilised. Accordingly, when all the men descended to the gorge for the purpose of levelling the palisade, Alexandros lingered behind with Justinian to receive his orders.

‘What is it, Kyrios ?’ he asked in Greek.

‘Alexandros,’ replied the Demarch fiercely, ‘I am leaving this island for ever, for, as you know, all our friends are dead ; but I will leave behind me an offer-

ing to their manes of all those scoundrels who have given me such trouble. You must carry out my wish.'

'I will, Kyrios.'

'Can you by those coils of rope up there escape down the face of the cliff?'

'Easily, Kyrios ; I am a monkey in climbing.'

'Good ! Well, when the pirates have gone up the pass, and we have gained the boat on the beach, you remain behind, and, when I give the signal, explode the mine. Thus the pass will be closed, sealing up the pirates in the crater, so if the volcano does burst out, they will be blown to pieces.'

'I will do it, Kyrios,' said Alexandros, who liked this scheme immensely ; 'and then I can escape down the cliff.'

'Keep it to yourself,' said the Demarch in a whisper, as they went out of the iron gate ; 'Mr. Maurice is too tender-hearted, and might not like it.'

How Justinian could reconcile this proposed massacre with the aversion he had felt the previous day in exploding his mine, it is hard to say, but the fact is, with all his troubles, his brain was becoming slightly affected, and he now deemed it a point of honour to sacrifice his enemies to the manes of his

dead subjects. After all, as he considered, and very truly, these pirates were but dangerous desperadoes, which the Ægean could very well spare, so the sooner they were cut short in their nefarious careers the better for the islanders of the Cyclades. Besides, Rudolph Roylands had, even in his old age, a wild and lawless spirit, only curbed by his wonderful powers of self-control, and in thus avenging himself on the enemies who had destroyed his cherished schemes, he was indulging in a burst of that Baresark fury which he inherited from his Norse ancestors.

With hard work the eight men managed to make a breach in the earthworks through which the enemy could pass, and all the carefully-built fortifications were levelled to the ground. It was growing dusk when they finished, and already they could hear a stir in the camp of the enemy, so, rapidly completing their work of devastation, they returned to the vantage-point, where they had left the women. Only the Demarch and his nephew lingered behind, the one to lock the iron gate, and the other to carry away the Union Jack, which still floated proudly over the ruined barricade.

‘They won’t get this, at all events, uncle,’ said Maurice gleefully, as he hauled down the flag; ‘I

wouldn't have it fall into their hands for a thousand pounds.'

'Sooner burn it,' retorted the Demarch fiercely ; 'but hurry up, Maurice, for, judging from the noise they are making, I suspect their forces are being drawn up.'

Roylands, with the folds of the flag wrapped round his body, ran through the iron gate with his uncle, and the latter having locked it carefully, they ascended the staircase in order to wait events.

It was just at that hour after sunset, when the day blending with the night produces that luminous twilight so noticeable in the Mediterranean. The little band, concealed from sight on the high cliff, could easily see in the warm glow how rapidly the enemy were gathering their forces together, but, in spite of all endeavours, none of them could see Caliphronas.

'I don't expect he has come back, uncle.'

'Oh yes, he has,' replied the Demarch grimly ; 'but, on the plea of his wound, he will remain behind in the camp, and let his army do the work. Once they conquer, he will come out and crow. That is Andros all over ; he likes to be the monkey, and use others as cats to pull the chestnuts out of the fire.'

‘I am very glad he is not leading them,’ said Maurice thoughtfully, ‘for he would be keen enough to mistrust appearances, and refrain from entering the pass in case of treachery, in which case we should be kept prisoners up here.’

Helena uttered a low cry of fear, and hid her face on Maurice’s shoulder, for at this moment the earth began to tremble slightly. The shock, however, was not a severe one, and did no damage, still it made the whole party feel uneasy, and wish they were relieved from their perilous position. The four Melnosians, who had lost all their friends and relatives, looked like statues of despair; still, so selfish is man for himself, that, though all their pleasure in life was gone, they were as uneasy and anxious to be saved as the rest of the party.

Luckily, owing to the ardour with which the enemy were forming their lines, they had not noticed the ominous warning of the earthquake, and were evidently about to make a grand assault on the barrier. At a given signal, they rushed wildly up the hill, shrieking like fiends, but recoiled in dismay as they saw the ruins of the palisade. Evidently suspecting treachery, they consulted together for a moment, then cautiously went forward into the pass. Finding no foe there to

confront them, they became more confident, and as Caliphronas, who could have shown them the way, was not present, they took no notice of the iron gate, but marched boldly up the gorge, firing their rifles at intervals, until not a single man was left either at the palisade or on the beach.

There was not a moment to be lost, so, Justinian leading, Maurice and Dick following with the women and the Melnosians, they went down to the foot of the stair, unlocked the door, and as rapidly as possible ran down the hill to the beach. Placing Helena, Zoe, and all their bundles in the best boat they could select in their hurry, Dick and Argyropoulos pushed it off into deep water.

'Where is Alexandros?' asked Maurice, noticing the absence of the electrician for the first time.

Justinian, with a grim smile, turned his face towards the cliffs and raised his hand, both to point out Alexandros to Maurice, and to give the signal for the exploding of the mine. Maurice stared aghast for a moment, and would have spoken, but before he could open his mouth there was a tremendous roar, and the great rocks at the mouth of the pass crashed down with a noise like thunder, blocking up the entrance for ever.



‘You have shut the pirates in, uncle!’

‘Yes,’ said the Demarch fiercely; ‘I have triumphed over my enemies.’

‘But Alexandros?’

‘Is safe. See! he is sliding down the rope.’

‘And the volcano!’

Even while the words were on his lips, the ground began to shake convulsively, and, with a cry, Helena fell back in the boat in a dead faint. Maurice and Justinian were thrown to the ground, and high above, amid the encircling peaks, shot up a mighty column of smoke, streaked with red fire.

‘The volcano!’ cried Maurice, dragging his uncle to his feet. ‘Quick! quick! get into the boat. Dick! Alexandros!’

They were both beside him, and assisted to take the Demarch towards the boat, but, to their dismay, found it had been left high and dry by the receding waters, which were curling backward from the land in streaks of livid white. The volcano now began to cast out great stones, and at intervals showers of boiling water, while lurid flames flashed fiercely through the gigantic column of smoke which loomed terrible and vague above the fatal island.

‘God! we shall be killed!’ cried Maurice as, with

the aid of Dick and Alexandros, he began to push the boat slowly towards the sea. 'Helena! Helena! lie down at the bottom of the boat.'

In order to push the craft to sea, Maurice had been forced to leave his uncle, but the old man was now on his feet, running towards him. Suddenly there was a shriek of agony, and through the falling stones, through the blinding dust, through the rain of fire, rushed Caliphronas, making for the boat.

'Save me, save me, Justinian! Maurice, help!'

'Traitor!' cried Justinian, turning fiercely on the Greek; 'now you shall reap the reward of your treachery.'

A thick, sulphureous smoke was spread around, and in this the two men were struggling, locked in a deadly grip. Temistocles and his three countrymen were already afloat, pulling away as hard as they could; but Maurice gave himself up for lost, as, in spite of all his efforts and those of Dick, the boat was too firmly embedded in the sand to be moved. Great bombs came shooting up into the sky from the heart of the volcano, and, bursting in the lurid air, huge rocks and showers of stones fell crashing on all sides; and, to add to the horror of the night,

Maurice, with a cry of despair, saw the sea rushing violently up to the land.

‘Uncle ! uncle ! the boat ! the boat !’

Dick and Alexandros scrambled in, while Maurice ran to help Justinian ; but, before he could reach him, he was engulfed in the waves of the sea, and half blindly saw a huge stone fall from heaven on his uncle and the struggling Greek. The waves foamed around the pair, but, without a cry, Caliphronas had been struck down, a bleeding, smashed-up mass, under the cruel rock ; while Justinian, also struck on the chest, could make no effort to save himself. Borne up by the force of the sea, Maurice felt rather than saw the boat rush past him towards the beach, but with an almost superhuman effort he managed to clutch his insensible uncle and keep afloat. The waters around were seething furiously, great stones kept splashing down on all sides, and above he could but see a sky of intense black smoke, through which played forked flashes of red fire.

The sea, having dashed right up to the cliffs, began to retire, upon which Dick and Alexandros leaped out of the boat to lighten her, and thus try to float her back into deep water. Maurice staggered to his feet, with his uncle in his arms, and strove to

reach the boat. Borne outward by the retreating waters, the light craft swept past him, but he also, abandoning himself to the waves, was carried seaward. In another second the boat was in deep water, and Dick, who had never let go the gunwale, leaped in with Alexandros. They looked anxiously through the gloom for Maurice and the Demarch, and as at this moment a flash of scarlet fire lighted up the furious sea, they caught a glimpse of them, and, in spite of the still outward-rushing water, tried to row obliquely towards the pair. For a moment it looked as if they could not be saved, but fortunately Maurice, though half stunned, still retained his senses, and was able to clutch the oar which Dick held out towards him. By this he was drawn gradually to the boat, which was rocking violently in the disturbed sea.

‘Take—uncle!—uncle first!’

Dick, with the assistance of Alexandros, managed to pull the insensible man on board, after which Maurice, half dead with exhaustion, also scrambled into the boat, and, the water now being calmer, they rowed rapidly out to sea.

The volcano was now spouting fire furiously, and in the glare they were able to see the entrance of the breakwater. By a miracle, they escaped the falling

stones, but, just as they were gliding past the massive masonry, they saw the boat of Temistocles dashed to pieces, and all on board go down in the crimson flood. Much as they wished to save the unfortunate men, they were unable to do so, for every second they expected to be crushed to death, so, rowing with the strength of despair, they shot out of the harbour far into the sea beyond. Justinian, Helena, and Zoe were all lying insensible at the bottom of the boat, Maurice was at the helm, and Alexandros, with Dick, was pulling for dear life, so as to get beyond the range of the projectiles shot from the volcano.

Alas! the beautiful Island of Fantasy! it was now nothing but a pillar of fire, and all the dead Melnosians, the living pirates, had been reduced to ashes in that terrible furnace. Already streaks of glowing lava began to move slowly down the sides of the mountain, colossal tongues of fire shot upward to the silent stars, and explosions, like distant cannonading, shook the mountain to its base. The noise was something deafening, but, luckily for the fugitives, they were now beyond the rain of stones, rocks, and bombs, while the sea, though still disturbed, was comparatively quiet.

They were floating on an ocean of blood, for the

crimson glare of the spouting fire smote sky and sea alike with its fiery blaze, and away in the distance arose the deserted Melnos, with its peaks crowned with thick vapours, from whence flashed streaks of fire.

The ever-turning wheel of time had come full circle, and the long extinct volcano was once more a burning mountain, vomiting death and destruction on all sides ; while far beyond, on the scarlet waters, floated the little boat containing five human beings, all that remained of the inhabitants who had dwelt in the beautiful valley of Melnos.



## CHAPTER XL.

### DEATH PAYS ALL DEBTS.

*The day is ended, the night is near—  
That's how I look at my end.  
The night is over, the day breaks clear—  
Such is your creed, my friend.  
But, yours or mine, does it matter much  
Which of our faiths is the true one—  
Mine, with its failure a future to touch,  
Or yours, so sure of a new one?*

*We both know nothing of what comes next,  
For that is my firm belief;  
'Tis waste to preach on an unproved text,  
And harrow our souls with grief.  
My life has not been what you call pure,  
Yet when drops this vexed life's curtain,  
I think my future is quite as sure  
As yours with its heaven certain.*



WITHOUT doubt Crispin's star was in the ascendant when he left Melnos on that perilous voyage to Syra, for in a very short space of time he was picked up by a Cretan steamer, and, on his arrival at his destination, found

the yacht lying in the harbour. Owing to her likeness to the unfortunate *Eunice* which had been wrecked, he had no difficulty in recognising her among the gay - coloured caïques and steamers from all countries which thronged in the bay below the white town of Syra. Hurrying at once on board, he was met by the Rector, Mrs. Dengelton, and Eunice, who were both surprised and delighted to see him so soon after their arrival in the *Ægean*. A long conversation at once ensued between the four, and Crispin described the perilous position in which he had left Justinian, much to the astonishment of the Rector, who could not understand that pirates still existed. As for Mrs. Dengelton, she asserted that no power on earth would induce her to go to Melnos, where there were so many dangers ; but in this selfish determination she was overruled by her daughter and Mr. Carriston.

It having been settled that all on board would remain, Crispin, in company with Gurt, hurried off to see the Eparch, and, on explaining the state of Melnos to him, managed to obtain about fifty men in order to assist the besieged. They were marched on board at once ; and late next day the yacht set sail for the Island of Fantasy, with every one in a



fearful state of excitement at the prospect of coming adventures.

During the voyage they met with a head wind, but this made but little difference to *The Eunice*, for, beating the water with her powerful screw, she forged steadily ahead in spite of wind and wave. The Hon. Mrs. Dengelton had long since recovered from sea-sickness, and was now as lively as ever, chatting gaily with Mr. Carriston, while Crispin, now being for the time at leisure, made love to Eunice. Both the lovers were in the seventh heaven of happiness at thus being reunited, and, had it not been for the state of uncertainty he felt about Melnos, Crispin would have been perfectly happy. For a wonder, Mrs. Dengelton had kept her promise, and not persuaded Eunice to marry any one else ; for which honourable conduct she deserved no praise, for as yet Crispin was the wealthiest suitor The Parrot had secured for her daughter. The lady, however, made a virtue of necessity, and frequently pointed out to Crispin how straightforwardly she had behaved, for which meritorious conduct the poet was duly thankful.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Dengelton, recovering her breath after a long harangue ; ‘when I make a promise I keep it. I said, find out who you are, and you shall

have my daughter. Well, here is Eunice, and here am I, both waiting for the promised explanation. Now, then, Mr. Crispin, who are you?’

‘I don’t know yet.’

‘Do you mean to say you cannot find out?’ screamed the lady.

‘No, I don’t say so, Mrs. Dengelton. As soon as we arrive at Melnos, Justinian will tell everything you and I desire to know.’

‘Justinian!’ echoed Mrs. Dengelton crossly, determined not to be satisfied. ‘Oh, dear Mr. Crispin, do not call my brother by that heathenish name!’

‘It is an honourable name!’ said the Rector good-naturedly. ‘You know it was Justinian, the Emperor of the East, who built St. Sophia, and was the author of the Pandects. My old friend Rudolph could scarcely have chosen a more suitable name for a law-giver.’

‘It is really wonderful to think of Rudolph still being alive,’ mused Mrs. Dengelton, taking no notice of the Rector’s historical explanation. ‘It will be like meeting a stranger, for I was a child in long clothes when he left England.’

‘Yes; fifty years does make a difference.’

‘Fifty years!’ shrieked Mrs. Dengelton, indignant

at the imputation of age. 'Oh, quite impossible, my dear Rector!—why, I am only forty-five, and as I was born when Rudolph left, it really cannot—it cannot'—

She was unable to utter that nauseous statement of fifty years, so the Rector good-humouredly came to her relief.

'Of course not—of course not, my dear lady. Time flies so quickly that we are apt to make mistakes. Your age, of course, is—is—?'

'Forty-five,' murmured the lady bashfully. 'Ah, I am indeed growing old. But I will be glad to see Rudolph again, and my niece. You say she is beautiful, Mr. Crispin?'

'Lovely!—as lovely as Eunice here.'

'Good looks run in our family,' said Mrs. Dengelton complacently. 'I myself—well, there, I was just like Eunice at her age. Yes, I will be glad to see Helena!'

'And I will be glad to see Melnos!' interposed the Rector. 'You can have no idea, my dear Crispin, how interested I was in Maurice's letter concerning this scheme of reconstructing Hellas. It is a noble dream, which may turn out into a reality.'

'Always provided there is no trouble from the pirates or the volcano, Mr. Carriston.'

‘Oh, I trust that the volcano is quiescent; and as for the pirates, I judge, from your description of the defences, that Maurice will be able to keep them at bay until we arrive.’

‘Certainly as a last resource they can close up the pass,’ said Crispin thoughtfully; ‘but that would leave them at the mercy of the volcano.’

‘They may be all burnt up,’ observed Mrs. Dengelton in a sepulchral tone; ‘and instead of Rudolph I may meet a cinder.’

‘I don’t think so, Mrs. Dengelton. Whatever happens, I have full faith in Justinian’s powers of extricating himself from any dilemma; besides, Maurice also is ingenious in ideas.’

‘My dear lad!’ said the Rector with emotion. ‘I am so anxious to see him. This siege seems to have made a new man of him.’

‘I don’t think you would recognise him, Rector. He is not listless now, but full of life and spirits. Love, open - air life, and responsibility have wrought wonders.’

‘And when do you think we will be in sight of Melnos?’

‘To-morrow morning, I think, but Gurt will know.’

Leaving Mrs. Dengelton and Eunice in the cabin,

the two gentlemen went on deck to see Gurt, who gave it as his opinion that they certainly would sight Melnos at dawn.

‘I hope we will find them alive, Gurt.’

‘Don’t you fear, Mr. Crispin, sir. Why, I’d back Mr. Roylands against the Dook of Wellintin himself for fightin’.’

The Rector was much delighted with Gurt, especially when he saw how the sailor worshipped Maurice ; and the tale of the siege of the island, as told by Gurt, with Maurice as the hero, was as brilliant and unreliable as *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*. Never being able to hear enough about his dear lad, Mr. Carriston asked Gurt to once more recite his Iliad, which the sailor was nothing loath to do, and the story lasted until all retired to rest.

The next morning at dawn they were in Cretan waters, and the Rector, Crispin, and Gurt were all on the look-out for the island. Just about sunrise they saw its conical shape dimly on the horizon, and Crispin, who had his glasses up, uttered a cry of dismay.

‘Why, there’s smoke!’ he said anxiously. ‘Can the volcano have broken out?’

‘I hope not! I trust not!’ cried Carriston turning

pale. 'Let me look, Crispin. You surely must be mistaken.'

Alas! there was no mistake, for, as they drew nearer, even without the aid of the lengthy tube of the binocle, the crest of the island appeared to be topped by a dark cloud of smoke, and they could hear at intervals the muffled roar of the volcano breathing fire and fury.

'O God! O God! my poor friends!' groaned Crispin, sinking down in deep despair; while the Rector, stunned with the magnitude of the calamity, could say nothing—not even a word of comfort. Both Mrs. Dengelton and Eunice were weeping bitterly at the thought of their terrible loss; but Gurt, in spite of the smoking volcano before his eyes, sturdily refused to believe that Justinian and his company were dead.

'Don't 'ee believe it, Mr. Crispin! Mr. Maurice knows a thing or two. If any one's frizzled, I guess it'll be them pirates; but Mr. Justinian and Miss Helena!—Lor', sir, Mr. Maurice 'ull see to 'em!'

At this moment the man on the look-out cried out that there was a boat in sight to the eastward, at which cheering intelligence the hearts of all revived, in the hope that it would prove to be their

friends escaped from the fatal island. The yacht's head was turned towards the speck in the distance, and she steamed ahead at full speed, so as to put an end to all suspense, while every one crowded to the taffrail, in order to catch the first glimpse of the occupants.

'Glory! glory!' yelled Gurt, dancing about in a state of great excitement. 'There's Mr. Maurice, sir! and Dick! What did I tell 'ee, Mr. Crispin! Glory! glory!'

'I don't see Justinian,' said Crispin anxiously; 'but see, there are two women. Those will be Helena and Zoe!'

'Sum'at lyin' in the boat,' cried Gurt, who had climbed up the weather rigging; 'maybe it's Mr. Justinian. Get her ahead, sir, an' we'll soon have 'em on board.'

*The Eunice* slowed down her engines when she approached the caïque, and the anxious faces bending over the side saw that it contained Maurice, Dick, Helena, and Zoe, all frightfully haggard-looking objects, and that at the bottom of the boat lay the form of a man covered with the folds of the Union Jack. The two young men, who seemed quite worn out with fatigue, brought the caïque along-

side the yacht, and, having passed up the women and the insensible Justinian, climbed on board themselves. Then ensued a scene of heartfelt welcome and congratulations, in which Maurice especially was nearly overwhelmed by the embraces of Crispin and the Rector.

‘Is Justinian dead?’ asked Crispin, when the first excitement had somewhat subsided.

‘No; but I am afraid he is dying!’

‘My poor lad!’ said the Rector pityingly; ‘you are quite worn out. Crispin, are you still going on to Melnos?’

‘What is the use, sir?’ said Dick bitterly; ‘it’s nothing but a heap o’ cinders.’

‘Any one still left on the island?’

‘Crispin,’ said Maurice solemnly, ‘with the exception of those you see, every soul on the island is dead. I will tell you all soon, but meanwhile I must have something to eat, a bath, and a sleep.’

The women had already carried off Helena and Zoe, to attend to them in their cabin; Justinian was taken down and put to bed; and the yacht’s head was turned back to Syra without delay, in order to obtain a doctor for the dying Demarch.



‘Where is Alexandros, Dick?’ asked Gurt, as he attended to the wants of the boatswain.

‘Fell overboard!’ replied Dick sadly; ‘he got away with us from that cursed island, but the big stones smashed up the boat like matchwood. We tried to save him, but he was so weak that before we could reach him he went down.’

‘And that ’ere Count?’

‘Oh, a stone from the volcano smashed him up also.’

‘Served him jolly well right!’ said Gurt cruelly. ‘My eye, Dick, ’ow glad I am t’ see ye, and Zoe too!’

‘If it hadn’t been for Mr. Roylands, we’d all have been lost, Gurt!’

‘Didn’t I say so!’ cried Gurt, bringing his fist down on the table with a mighty thump. ‘Wot a man he is! Lord Nelsing and the Dook of Wellington were nothin’ to him—nothin’!’

In spite of the speed of the yacht, she was unable to reach Syra in time to save the life of the Demarch, for the stone from the volcano had so crushed in his chest, that internal hæmorrhage had taken place, and there was no hope of saving his life. He revived, however, shortly after being taken on board, and was conscious to the last, not without some gleams of his former grim humour at the cause of his death.

‘That ungrateful Melnos!’ he said feebly, as he lay back in his berth, clasping his daughter’s hand; ‘I gave it bread, and it returns me a stone—a stone to crush me to death. Well, at all events it killed Andros, and of that I am glad.’

‘Hush, hush, my dear friend!’ said the Rector gently; ‘you must not talk like that. Forgive your enemies.’

‘What! forgive that monster of ingratitude, who brought so many troubles on me, and ruined my schemes.’

‘Yes,’ said Carriston firmly; ‘the greater the sinner, the more need has he of forgiveness. If you forgive not your enemies their sins, how can you expect God to forgive you?’

‘What about yourself, Rector?’

‘I have no enemies,’ replied Carriston with great dignity; ‘but even if I had, I would forgive them freely.’

‘Very well,’ said the Demarch with a cynical smile, which but ill became his pallid face; ‘I will put you to the test. Call in every one.’

Considerably puzzled at this remark, the Rector did as he was bidden, and in a short space of time Maurice, Crispin, Mrs. Dengelton, and Eunice were

gathered round the bed of the dying man. Helena still sat near him, holding his hot hand ; and the Demarch, thus having got his audience together, began to make his last confession.

‘ You say, Rector, you have no enemies.’

‘ No, not that I know of !’

‘ Think a little, Mr. Carriston. What about thirty years back ?’

‘ Thirty years back !’ repeated Carriston growing pale.

‘ And Captain Malcolm, who ran off with your wife and child !’

‘ How do you know that ?’ asked the Rector with a reproachful glance at Roylands. ‘ Has Maurice’—

‘ I have said nothing, sir,’ cried Maurice flushing deeply ; ‘ how can you suspect me of such a thing !’

‘ I beg your pardon, my dear lad,’ replied the Rector penitently ; ‘ I was wrong to do so. Still, how does Mr. Justinian know ’—

‘ For the very simple reason that he was Captain Malcolm,’ said the Demarch faintly.

‘ You !’ cried Carriston, recoiling with a shudder, — ‘ you ! Are you the man who wrecked my life, and stole my dear ones from me ?’

‘I am that man!’ said Justinian, looking at him with weak defiance. ‘Come now, where is your forgiveness?’

The Rector was deeply moved, and sat on the edge of the berth, with his hands clasped, and great drops of perspiration rolling down his pale face. A terrible struggle was going on in his mind, for it appeared to him almost impossible to forgive this man, who had wronged him so bitterly. Justinian, observer of human nature to the last, looked at him with a faint sneer on his dying lips.

‘I thought you would not practise what you preached.’

‘You are wrong! you are wrong!’ cried the Rector, springing to his feet. ‘God forgive me! I should not have hesitated a moment. I do forgive you! I forgive you freely.’

Justinian was so moved to sudden emotion at this noble behaviour on the part of the man he had wronged, that for the moment he was deprived of speech.

‘I see there are some good men still on earth,’ he said at length in a faltering voice. ‘Mr. Carriston, I thank you for your noble conduct, which has taken me quite by surprise. I acknowledge I have wronged

you deeply, and cannot palliate my conduct, but I can and will make reparation.'

'My wife?' groaned the Rector bitterly.

'Is dead; but your son is by your side.'

The Rector turned suddenly round and found himself face to face with Crispin, whose countenance was as pallid as his own. They gazed for a moment at one another, suffocated with emotion, then, casting all restraint to the winds, fell into one another's arms.

'You will find all the necessary papers to convince you of this truth with my lawyers in London,' said the Demarch with evident pleasure at this meeting of long parted father and son.

'I am convinced now,' replied Carriston, as he stood with his hand on Crispin's shoulder. 'Yes! this is indeed my son.'

'Still, you had better see the papers,' said Justinian faintly. 'There is a letter for you from your wife, which will tell you all you wish to know. Rector, I have been a great sinner, I know, still I don't think there are many actions I regret so much as robbing you of your wife. However, I have done my best to make amends, and you have forgiven me. But Crispin?'

'I also forgive you freely,' said Crispin, clasping the

hand of the dying man; 'for by this confession, you have not only given me a father, but a wife.'

'Yes, take her!' sobbed Mrs. Dengelton, pushing her daughter towards the poet. 'I always liked you, Crispin—or shall I say Mr. Carriston?'

'I think it must be Crispin Carriston,' said the Rector, drawing Eunice towards him, 'for I love the name of Crispin too well to part with it.'

'My dear father!'

'Maurice!' said Justinian, who was getting weaker.

'Yes, uncle?'

'You will find my will at my lawyer's; it leaves all the money to you and Helena, who is to be your wife.'

'My dear wife!' repeated Maurice, kissing the weeping girl. 'As to your money, uncle, I do not require it.'

'You must take it, my son. Helena is my heiress, and, alas! now Melnos has vanished in smoke and fire, there is no use for it there. You will return to England, Maurice, and, with all this wealth, do what good you can in the world. Crispin is already rich, so it would be useless to leave him anything.'

'I have Eunice, and that is enough for me.'

'Well, now all is arranged, we must drop the curtain on this comedy of life,' said Justinian with a

flash of his old cynicism. 'After all, I have played my part to the best of my ability on this life's stage, but Fate has been too strong for me.'

'It is the will of God,' observed the Rector solemnly.

Justinian said nothing, as he did not wish to offend the firm faith of the old clergyman, but he could not, for the life of him, think that it was the will of God that forty years of hard work to raise up a new civilisation should be blotted out for no reason whatsoever.

'Life's a problem!' he said with a faint sigh; 'we do our best, and remain poor; we do our worst, and become rich. However, it is all over now, and of all my schemes nothing remains. Dust, ashes, smoke, fire, have they all come to, and I, after seventy-five years of life, die foiled and beaten by Fate.'

'Oh, father, do not talk so! You will not die! you will live!'

'I am afraid not, my child!' replied the dying man faintly; 'the parting gift of Melnos has crushed the life out of me. Oh, my island, my beautiful island! that bloomed like a rose on the waters! how your glory has departed! The forge of Hephaistos hath supplanted the garden of Cytherea.'

‘Shall I not pray for you?’ asked the Rector gently.

‘To whom? God? Well, a good man’s prayer, can do no harm, and, if there is truth in your belief, may do some good. But we are all in the dark, you with your Christianity, I with my paganism. The comedy is ended, drop the curtain.’

‘Oh, father, father! do not talk so!’ sobbed Helena, burying her face in her hands.

‘Hush, my child! I am not afraid. Rector, you can pray for me, but, now all is told and done, leave me with my child. Good-bye, my sister; I never knew you, so we are almost strangers—good-bye. Kiss me, Eunice, and be a good wife to Crispin, who loves you so dearly. Crispin, I have wronged you, but made reparation. Dick! Gurt! you have been true men, and Maurice will look after your future Maurice, my dear son, good-bye. Be a kind husband to my child, and comfort her in her sorrow. Bury me at sea, for I will have no meaner grave than the mighty ocean. Good-bye, one and all—good-bye!’

They took leave of him in silence, one by one, and then left the cabin quietly, leaving him alone with Helena and the Rector, who was already on his knees reciting the service for the dying. On deck, the sun was setting in splendour, leaving trails of



glory in the heavens, and sadly they remained there, waiting for the end. In about half an hour, the Rector, pale and sad, appeared on the deck.

‘It is all over!’

The next day, the yacht arrived at Syra, with her ensign half-mast, as a token of the dead on board. Here the men whom Crispin had recruited for the defence of Melnos were paid off and dismissed. No one on board cared to remain longer in the Archipelago, now so fraught with sad associations, so, after a few hours’ stay, *The Eunice* steamed out of the harbour on her way to old England once more.

Off the island of Cerigo, to the extreme south of the Peloponnesus, Justinian’s body was committed to the deep, wrapped in no meaner shroud than that ragged Union Jack, shot nearly into tatters, which had floated so proudly over the well-defended stockade. The Rector, in a voice broken by emotion, read the burial service over the body of the dead Demarch, who, whatever his faults might have been, was a great man. The engines were slowed down, the body, wrapped in its glorious pall, shot with a sullen splash into the sea, and then the yacht, with set sails and beating screw, plunged on, through the purple seas, towards England.

Helena was almost broken-hearted with her loss, and shut herself up in her cabin to lament in solitude. This, however, Maurice would not allow, as he was afraid of her becoming ill, and one evening, when all were at dinner, he persuaded her to come up on deck, where the glory of the sunset was burning with splendour in the far west.

‘My dearest,’ he said tenderly, taking her in his arms, as they stood facing the keen sea breeze, ‘you must not break your heart like this. Your father would never have survived the loss of Melnos, so he had his wish, and died when all his hopes of a new Hellas were at an end. I must be your comforter now, Helena, and when you are my dear wife I trust to make you so happy, that you will be able to look back with calmness on this loss, which you now think—and justly—so bitter. Hush, hush, my dear love! We will face the future together, and live down our past sorrows.’

Helena, drying her eyes, put her cold little hand into his, and looked trustfully up into his face, but was too overcome by her feelings to trust herself to speech.

The sun, dying in the west, was flooding the heavens with gold, and just above the intolerable

brilliance on the horizon appeared a fantastically shaped cloud, like an isle all broken into bays, capes, peaks, and plains. In the glowing splendour it looked so frail and ethereal, that, even as they gazed, it melted away before their eyes like a fairy vision.

‘The Island of Fantasy!’ murmured Helena.

‘My love! The real Island of Fantasy has vanished; the cloud Island of Fantasy has disappeared; but in our hearts, my Helena, there is a land of fairy loveliness, which will endure for ever, and some day, my child, when we leave this world, we will find our beautiful island once again, more glorious than of yore, with your father to welcome us there.’

FINIS.



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